

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 00106695 0

From Plymouth  
 road a short distance  
 to the plain that will  
 be most useful

206 213

In Plymouth road to the  
 adapted to these conditions  
 as for the purpose of perfect  
 and would be useful for  
 practice

propagate on the ground  
 or land by the same











## SOCIAL RIGHTS AND DUTIES

*The Volumes of the Series already Published are :—*

**Civilisation of Christendom, and other Studies.**

By BERNARD BOSANQUET, M.A. (Oxon.), Hon.  
LL.D. (Glasgow). 4s. 6d.

**Short Studies in Character.** By SOPHIE BRYANT,

D.Sc. (Lond.). 4s. 6d.

**Social Rights and Duties.** By LESLIE STEPHEN.

2 vols., 9s.

Other Volumes to follow by—

Professor A. SIDGWICK, Professor D. G. RITCHIE, and  
J. H. MUIRHEAD, Esq. (the Editor).

Philos.  
Ethics  
582858

The Ethical Library

# SOCIAL RIGHTS AND DUTIES

ADDRESSES TO ETHICAL  
SOCIETIES

BY

LESLIE STEPHEN

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.



82589  
5/6/07

LONDON

SWAN SONNENSCHN & CO., LIMITED

NEW YORK: MACMILLAN & CO.

1896

ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY PRESS.

## NOTE.

THE following chapters are chiefly a republication of addresses delivered to the Ethical Societies of London. Some have previously appeared in the *International Journal of Ethics*, the *National Review*, and the *Contemporary Review*. The author has to thank the proprietors of these periodicals for their consent to the republication.

L. S.

# CONTENTS.

	PAGE
HEREDITY, - - - - -	I
PUNISHMENT, - - - - -	55
LUXURY, - - - - -	95
THE DUTIES OF AUTHORS, - - - - -	137
THE VANITY OF PHILOSOPHISING, - - - - -	183
FORGOTTEN BENEFACTORS, - - - - -	225



## HEREDITY.

I FOUND, the other day, that an address upon Heredity had been announced, of which I was to be the deliverer. I admit that I was fully responsible for the statement, although, for reasons with which I need not trouble you, I was not quite prepared for it in this form. I mention this fact in order simply to say that the title may possibly give rise to false expectations. I am quite incompetent to express any opinion of the slightest scientific value upon certain problems suggested by that rather ugly word "heredity". The question as to the precise relationship between any organism and its parents or remoter ancestors, is one of the highest interest. The solution, for example, of the problem, whether is it possible for a living being to transmit to its descendants qualities which have only been acquired during its own lifetime, has an important bearing upon the general theory of evolution. But I have nothing whatever to suggest in regard to that problem. I simply take it for granted that there is some relation between parents and children: and a relation, speak-

VOL. II. I

ing in the most general way, such that the qualities with which we start in life, resemble more or less closely those of our ancestors. I may also assume that, in some form or other, the doctrine of evolution must be accepted: and that all living things now in the world are the descendants, more or less modified, of the population which preceded them. I proceed to ask whether, as some people appear to believe, the acceptance of this doctrine in the most unqualified form, would introduce any difficulty into our primary ethical conceptions. I will also at once give my answer. I do not believe that it introduces any difficulty whatever. I do believe that the general theory of evolution tends in very important ways to give additional distinctness to certain ethical doctrines; although, to go at all fully into the how and the why would take me beyond my present purpose. All that I have to argue to-day is, that a belief in "heredity" need not be a stumbling-block to any reasonable person.

I cannot doubt that the popular mind is vaguely alarmed by the doctrine. I read, the other day, a novel by a well-known author, of which, so far as I can remember, the main substance was as follows: A virtuous doctor (his virtue had some limitations) studied the problem of heredity, and had read Darwin, and Herbert Spencer, and Weissmann, and all the

proper authorities. His own researches are carefully described, with the apparent assumption that they were both profound and of tremendous significance. He had, it appears, accumulated a vast amount of material; and his method was to cut out slips from newspapers, whenever they recorded any events in his own family history, and to preserve them in a mysterious cabinet. These investigations proved that there was a decided family likeness running through the descendants of a common ancestor. As a general rule, they had all belonged to the class "blackguard". From this result he inferred that there was no God and no soul. His relations were dreadfully scandalised: one was converted to his views; but the others contrived diabolical plots for setting fire to these marvellous collections and so stopping the contagion of these dreadful doctrines at their source. It struck me, I confess, that instead of burning the collections, they would have done better to ask him what was the connection between his premisses and his conclusions. What was this terrible, heart-paralysing truth which the poor man had discovered? Has any human being ever doubted, since mothers were invented, that children are apt to resemble their parents? I do not personally remember the fact, but I should be prepared to bet, if the point could be settled, that, before I was a month

old,—and in those days neither Darwin nor Weissmann had published a line,—my nurse and my mother had affirmed that the baby was like his papa. That, at any rate, is a remark, the omission of which would show more originality than the assertion. If I desired, again, to produce classical authority for the importance of race, I should not have to extend my researches beyond the Latin Grammar. If, once more, we look into the writings of famous theologians, we meet it everywhere. I take the first that comes to hand. “Good men,” says Calvin, “and beyond all others, Augustine, have laboured to demonstrate, that we are not corrupted by any adventitious means but that we derive an innate depravity from our very birth.” The denial of this was an instance of consummate impudence—reserved, as Calvin shows, for such wicked heretics as Pelagius. The doctrine of heredity, in short, in a theological version, is essentially involved in the dogmatic foundations of the orthodox creed. I have no doubt that an investigation of the reasonings of Augustine and others would exhibit much affinity to modern controversy, though in a very different terminology. Whatever we may think of its merits, the doctrine of original sin implies that a depraved nature may have been transmitted to the whole human race ; and, if the commonly alleged cause of the original depravity strikes us as insuffi-

cient, it is, at least, a very familiar argument of divines, that the doctrine corresponds to undeniable facts. Why should it startle us in a scientific dress? If we can transmit depravity, why not genius and bodily health? In one respect, modern theories tend rather to limit than to extend the applicability of the principle. No one ever doubted, nor could doubt, that the child of a monkey is always a monkey; and that the child of a negro, or even of a Mongol, has certain characteristics which distinguish it from the child of a European. But the difference is that, whereas it used to be held that there was an impassable barrier between the monkey and the man, it is now widely believed that both may be descendants from a common ancestor. Should this belief establish itself, we shall have to admit that, in spite of heredity, organic forms are capable of much wider variation than was believed by our fathers to be even conceivable.

Let us try, then, to discover some more plausible explanation of the fear excited by the doctrine. Now, I wish to give as wide a berth as possible to that freewill controversy which perplexes so many minds, and is apt to intrude at this point. I will try to assume,—though it is not my own position,—the doctrine of the freedom of the will in the widest sense that any reasonable person can devise. No such

person will deny that there is a close connection—the terms of which have not yet been defined—between the physical constitution and the moral or intellectual character. The man plainly grows out of the baby. If the baby's skull has a certain conformation it can only be an idiot; with another skull and brain it may be developed into a Shakespeare or a Dante. The possibilities ranging between those limits are immovably fixed at birth. And what determines the constitution with which the child is born? Surely it can be nothing but the constitution and circumstances of its parents. Whether I can be a great man, or cannot be more than a commonplace man, or a fool,—nay, whether I shall be man or monkey or an oak,—is settled before I have had any power of volition at all. Now, it is curious how, even at this early period, we are led to use delusive language. The difficulty is quaintly indicated in a remark by Jonathan Swift. The dean “hath often been heard to say” (says a fragment of autobiography) “that he felt the consequences of his parents' marriage, not only through the whole course of his education, but during the greater part of his life”. If they had not married, he apparently implies, he would have been born of other parents, and certainly would have felt it for life. What the word “he” means in that connection, is a puzzle for

---

logicians. I fell into the difficulty myself, the other day, when I had occasion to say that a man's character had been influenced, both by his inheritance of certain qualities and by the later circumstances of his education. Having said this, which, I think, aimed at a real meaning, it occurred to me that the phrase was grossly illogical, and I shall be still obliged if any one will put it straight for me. The difficulty was, that I had used the same form of words to indicate the influence of a separable accident, and to describe one aspect of the essential character. To say that a man is influenced by his education is to say that he would have been different had he gone, for example, to another school. That is intelligible. But to say that "he" would have been different if he had been born of other parents is absurd, for "he" would not have been "he". He would not have existed at all. "He" means the man who has grown out of the baby with all its innate qualities; and not some, but all those qualities, the very essence of the man himself, is, of course, the product of his progenitors. Such phrases, in short, suggest the fancy that a man had a pre-existence somewhere, and went about like Er the Pamphylian in Plato's myth, selecting the conditions of his next stay upon earth. In that case, no doubt, there might be some meaning in the doctrine. The



character of the future incarnation would depend upon the soul's choice of position. But as we know nothing about any pre-existent soul, we must agree that each of us starts as the little lump of humanity, every characteristic of which is determined by the characteristics of the parents, however much its later career may be affected by the independent powers of thought and volition which it develops. So much, it seems to me, must be granted on all hands, and is perhaps implicitly denied by no one.

But granting this very obvious remark, what harm does "heredity" do us? It is the most familiar of all remarks that you and I and all of us depend upon our brains in some sense. If they are pierced, we die; if they are inflamed, we go mad; and their constitution determines the whole of our career. A grain of sand in the wrong place, as the old epigrams have told us,—in Cæsar's eye, for example,—may change the course of history. That unlucky fly, which, as Fuller remarks, could find no other place to creep into in the whole patrimony of St. Peter except the Pope's throat, choked the unlucky man, and, for the time at least, altered the ecclesiastical order of Christendom. In other words, we are dependent at every instant upon elements in the outside world,—bacteria, for instance,—and the working of our own physical organism. But, that being so, what



conceivable difference does it make whether the brain, which we certainly did not ourselves make, has a fixed resemblance to that of our parents, or be, if it be possible, the product of some other series of processes? It is important, no doubt, to recognise the fact; it would be of the highest importance if we could define the exact nature of the fact; but the influence upon any general ethical doctrine of the recognition of the bare fact itself seems to be precisely nothing at all. It is part of the necessary data of all psychological speculation, and has been recognised with more or less precision from the very first attempts to speculate.

Trying, once more, to discover what it is that alarms, or is said to alarm, some people, we are reminded of certain facts, which again are of profound interest in some respects. I take a special instance,—not, unfortunately, a rare or at all a strange instance,—to illustrate the point. Many years ago I knew a clergyman, a man of most amiable character and refined tastes. One morning he shocked his friends by performing the Church service in a state of intoxication, and within a few months had drunk himself to death. The case was explained,—that is, a proper name for it was found,—when we learnt that more than one of his nearest relations had developed similar propensities, and died in much the same way.

Then we called it an instance of "hereditary dipsomania," and were more or less consoled by the classification. We were not, I think, unreasonable. The discovery proved apparently that the man whom we had respected and admired was not a vulgar debauchee, who had been hypocritically concealing his vices; but that he had really possessed the excellent qualities attributed to him, only combined with an unfortunate constitutional tendency, which was as much a part of his original nature as a tendency to gout or consumption. Now this, as I think, suggests the problem which puzzles us at times. A man develops some vicious propensity, for which we were quite unprepared. In some cases, perhaps, he may show homicidal mania or kleptomania, or some of the other manias which physicians have discovered in late years. They say, though the lawyers are rather recalcitrant, that a man suffering from such a mania is not "responsible"; and if asked, why not? they reply, because he was the victim of a disease which made him unable to resist the morbid impulse. But then, we say, are not all our actions dependent upon our physical constitution? If a man develops homicidal mania, may not a murderer of the average type excuse himself upon the same ground? You have committed an action, we say, which shows you to be a man of abnormal wickedness. You are a blood-

thirsty, ferocious, inhuman villain. Certainly, he may reply ; but if you could examine my brain you would see that I could not be anything else. There is something wrong about its molecular construction, or about the shape of the skull into which it was fitted, which makes bloodthirstiness quite as inevitable in me as a tendency to drink is in others, or perhaps as the most ardent philanthropy may be in some. In short, I am a murderer ; but wickedness is so natural to me that you must in all fairness excuse me.

This is, of course, a kind of excuse which would not free a man from the gallows. It would simply suggest that punishment should not be considered from the moral, but, if I may say so, from the sanitary point of view. We should hang the murderer—not to satisfy our sense of justice, but to get rid of a nuisance. I will not now inquire what may be said upon that undoubtedly difficult problem ; but I must touch upon the previous question which is raised by the argument. Would our supposed murderer make out a good case for himself ? Is there no difference between him and the maniac ; or, rather, what is the nature of the difference which we clearly recognise in practice ? In the extreme case which our ancestors took as the typical case, the madman kills because he is under some complete illusion : he

supposes that he is only breaking a glass when he is really taking a life, and so forth. He is therefore not wicked, but accidentally mischievous. We have now come to recognise the existence of many states of mind intervening between this and complete sanity. Among them, for example, is the state of mind of the homicidal monomaniac, whose propensity is considered to be the cause of his actions, and which may be consistent with his being in many other respects capable of acting upon the ordinary motives and judging reasonably in most of the affairs of life. What, then, is the meaning of the statement that he is a madman, and therefore excusable? The contention must, of course, be, in the first place, that his character is in some way abnormal. He is not governable by the ordinary motives which determine human action. But, beyond this, it is evident that the abnormality is taken to mean something more than the mere deviation from the average. A man may be abominably wicked, and yet not in the least abnormal in the sense here required. He may be deficient in the higher motives, and the more brutal passions may be unusually developed; and yet we do not hold that he therefore deviates from the type. So, in a different sphere, we may have one man possessing enormous strength and another exceedingly feeble, one very active and another very clumsy; and

yet they may all be perfectly normal, they are free from physical disease, and all their physical functions may be performed according to the normal system. Entire freedom from disease, in short, is perfectly compatible with exceedingly wide deviations from the average, with capacity for walking a thousand miles in a thousand hours, or with inability to walk a single mile; and yet such deviations do not imply a departure from a certain common type. To say precisely what symptoms indicate mere differences within the normal type, and what imply an actual deviation from the type, is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible; and yet that such a distinction exists has to be constantly recognised. "So-and-so is delicate, but not diseased; feeble, but not deformed," has a definite meaning, though we may be unable to define the precise meaning of our words, or to decide which statement is true in particular cases.

The great difficulty in the case of insanity corresponds to this. The physician tells us that the madman's mind works abnormally, but not abnormally in the sense merely of having some faculties weaker and others stronger than is common; but in such a way as to indicate disease, and, moreover, a particular kind of diseases, or one, perhaps, of several particular kinds of diseases. The vagueness of this statement provokes lawyers, who have a natural love

of definite external tests to govern their decisions ; and it has led to a number of delicate discussions, upon which I need not enter. The legal problem seems essentially to be, what tests should guide us in determining whether a man should be regarded as a normal human being, or as a being so far differing from the normal type that he should be treated exceptionally, and especially put under the guidance of other persons, and excused from legal responsibility, that is, liability to punishment.

I have to do with the moral problem alone. It is a still more difficult problem ; but it has this advantage, that we do not require so definite an answer. We have not, happily, to decide whether our fellows shall go to heaven or to hell, though we have to decide whether they shall be hanged or locked up ; and we must be content as a rule with very vague estimates as to their moral character. What we practically have to take, more or less roughly, into account is simply this : that our inference from conduct to character has often to be modified by the existence of these abnormal cases. A man is drunk on an important occasion ; I infer, as a rule, that he has all the qualities which go with low sensuality ; but in some cases the inference is wrong ; the man may be really a person of most admirable feelings ; but one of his instincts has suddenly taken an



abnormal development, owing to a set of causes entirely different from the usual causes. Another man suddenly and causelessly kills a friend. The natural inference that he must be a bloodthirsty brute is erroneous, if it turns out that he has acted from impulses not generated by any habitual want of benevolence, but from some special defect in the constitution of his brain. In other words, our moral judgment must vary in the two cases, and may vary so much that the same action may rightly suggest only pity in one case and abhorrence in the other ; although, in many cases, where it may be very difficult to say what is the precise implication as to character, the judgment must, if we are properly diffident, remain obscure. The moral problem always depends ultimately upon this : What is the character implied by this conduct ? If the moral conduct shows malignity within the normal type, it justifies condemnation ; if it shows only a blind instinctive impulse, due to a deflection from the type, it may justify no other feelings than those which we have for the poor maniac who fancies himself a king, and takes his limbs to be made of glass.

If we hold that such responsibility implies free will we shall argue that the madman is deprived of free will, or that his freedom of will is more or less restricted, and that he is therefore irresponsible. In

my own opinion, that proposition would be by no means an easy one to establish. I fancy that a man may be insane and yet capable, within very wide limits, of being good or bad, and that therefore we must at any rate hold that he has still some power of free will. The bearing of this upon the question of moral responsibility brings us within sight of some delicate problems. But, however this may be, the criterion by which we shall have to judge whether we are believers in free will or determinists will be the same. The problem is essentially, is this man accessible to the motives by which normal men regulate their conduct? or does he so far deflect from the typical constitution, however that constitution may be precisely defined, that his conscience or his affections or his intellectual powers are unable to act according to the general laws of human nature?

Having said so much, I think that I may proceed to this conclusion, that the theory of heredity can make no real difference whatever to our problem. There is a difficulty for the metaphysician—the difficulty which is involved in discussions between materialists and idealists, determinists and believers in free will. I do not deny the existence of that difficulty. I only say that the question of heredity is altogether irrelevant to the difficulty. The desire to treat ethical problems by the methods of science may



predispose a thinker to materialism, and may at the same time lead him to attach particular importance to the doctrine of heredity. But that doctrine only takes note of facts which every theory has to state in its own phraseology, and do not alter the ultimate problem.

Let us, in fact, go back to our murderer. I am not responsible, he says, because I am determined by the processes in my brain. I am a mere machine, grinding out one set of actions or another as external accidents set my wheels and pulleys in motion. If that argument be fatal to moral responsibility, or to the belief that any truly moral action exists (a point which I do not argue), it will no doubt remove the moral element from the treatment both of murderers and madmen. They might still require different measures, just as we treat a machine differently when we consider that it is not of the normal construction, or that its various parts have somehow got out of gear, so that we can no longer, for example, expect that the mainspring will transmit its motion to the wheels. But, in any case, if the dependence upon the body be a fatal objection to morality in the highest sense, the circumstance that the body is made upon the plan of previously existing bodies makes no additional difficulty. If we could suppose every brain to be started afresh by a fortuitous con-

course of atoms, the difficulty would be neither increased nor diminished. The problem, are we automatic? and the validity of the inference, is morality meaningless? are questions altogether independent of the question, what particular kind of automata are we? and do we or do we not resemble a previous generation of automata?

If, however, we reply to the criminal that he is not a machine or an automaton, but a responsible, reasoning, and thinking being, we do not get away from the facts. We then assert that he is responsible because he possesses a certain moral constitution. But whatever words we may use to express the facts correctly, we must still allow that there is such a correlation between soul and body (if those old-fashioned words be admissible) that the health of his moral constitution depends at every instant upon the health of his nervous system and his brain. It may be shattered or destroyed by an injury; and, if this be so, what does it matter whether the injury—say the defective shape of the skull, which causes pressure on the brain—is due to some accident or to a connate malformation due to his parents? The difficulty, if it be difficulty, is that the want of responsibility is due to some cause, accidental relatively to him; and it matters not whether that cause be in his parents' constitution or in some other com-

bination of circumstances. In any case, we have to suppose, whatever the relation of mind and body, we must at least assume that a man is born with some character. Like everything that exists, he has certain definite qualities which he did not make for himself, and upon which his subsequent development depends. And, if that be once admitted, the whole difficulty still occurs, and the question as to whether the origin of these innate qualities be derived from his parents or from a something else is a mere matter of detail.

In fact, the confusion seems to me to arise from the vague phraseology which induces us to accept, virtually at least, the mental attitude of Dean Swift in *Er the Pamphylian*. We speak as if the man were an independent entity, lying somehow outside the chain of cause and effect, and arbitrarily plunged into it; nay, as if even his inner constitution were something superinduced upon his nature. It is really an absurd abstraction to distinguish between the man and his character, as though he meant a something existing without a character, and afterwards run into a mould by fate. The character is the man in certain relations, and he can never exist without it, any more than a piece of matter can be outside of all particular times and places. If the doctrine of free will and moral responsibility be so

interpreted as to imply our acceptance of such fallacies, I can only say that it appears to me to be irreconcilable with the most undeniable facts. But I am very far from supposing that any intelligent supporter of the doctrine would state it in such a form. He would admit as fully as I do the facts, and, if they can be admitted and reconciled to the doctrine of moral responsibility, certainly the doctrine of heredity can be so reconciled. The only peculiarity of the doctrine is, that it has called attention to an order of facts which must in any case be recognised by every philosopher; and that it helps, therefore, to disperse a fallacy which only requires articulate statement to show its radical want of logic or even conceivability. We are, beyond all doubt, affected somehow, and affected profoundly, by our environment; and this particular form of relation to other beings has no more bearing upon the problem than the other forces which have been recognised ever since speculation began.

There is, however, another side from which I must briefly consider the question of heredity; and it is a side which, I think, is really more important, because it involves issues of facts, and has suggested some more reasonable prejudices. It is, undoubtedly, very common that when a theory has obtained a certain currency it should be applied rashly beyond its

proper limits. When the speculations of Darwin encouraged us to believe that the natural selection might be analogous to artificial selection, that different species of animals have been produced as varieties of dogs and pigeons have been produced by breeders, it was, at least, tempting to apply the same formula directly to other cases. Some men of science have endeavoured to show that genius or criminality is hereditary; and that, if one man writes a great poem and another picks a pocket, it is always in virtue of their hereditary endowment. Within certain limits, this statement is not surprising, and I shall be very glad when men of science can tell us what those limits may be. Without being a man of science, I fully believe that our congenital characteristics form, as I have said, certain impassable limits to our development. One baby is a potential Shakespeare, and, probably, only one in a million. The qualities with which he starts, again, are, no doubt, derived from his parents, though we do not, as yet, understand in what way; whether, for example, we should infer that Shakespeare's parents had more than usual capacity, or were especially healthy, or had some peculiar form of one-sided development which generated the disease called poetical genius; or whether he may have inherited qualities from a remote ancestor, which had remained latent for several

---

generations. In any case, he was at birth only a potential Shakespeare. He might have died of the measles, or been made stupid by a sunstroke, or have taken to drink in bad company, or have run away to sea, or been sent to the University and become a mere bishop or professor of casuistry ; in short, though he could not easily have done very much better work than he did, he might have done inconceivably less. That is to say, his congenital qualities implied certain powers ; but what he would do with them remained to be partly determined by an indefinite variety of external circumstances acting upon him in various ways. Hence, we have always the complex problem, what, given certain raw material in the shape of new-born babies, will be the characteristics of the finished product in the shape of a grown-up population ? If the social state is determined from the inherited qualities directly, we should be able, for example, to infer from a given proportion of criminals, that a certain number of children were born with a corresponding physical constitution, with "foreheads villainous low," and prognathous jaws, and with the other peculiar signs which mark the felon from his birth. In that case, again, we should infer, I suppose, that the only possible means of improving the social state would be by somehow improving the breed ; perhaps, by appointing some



of the inspectors who play so great a part in modern society, to examine infants, and get rid of those who were thus distinguished, by the means now adopted in the case of superfluous puppies. One objection to this system is, of course, that men of science have not yet shown that they are qualified for exercising such a supervision; and there are other difficulties upon which I need not dwell. This much, indeed, we may grant without any scientific prepossessions whatever. It is clearly very desirable that every generation should raise up for its successors as many children with sturdy bodies and vigorous brains as possible; and it is to be hoped that the objection to transmitting disease and imbecility may be more generally recognised, and, in some shape or other, have an influence even upon the strongest passions. But I am only concerned with the general theory, which, if I understand it rightly, would appear to imply that the characteristics of a society are irrevocably fixed by the characteristics of the children born into it; and, whether this theory be true or false, we must admit that it has a considerable bearing upon morality. If, in fact, we hold it to be rigidly true, we should have to suppose that no serious improvement can be produced in society at large, except by breeding a superior race of men. This, again, is a discouraging prospect. Let me

quote what has been said by an authority who expresses, I believe, the accepted scientific view. "There can be no doubt," says Professor Huxley, "that vast changes have taken place in English civilisation since the days of the Tudors. But I am not aware that there is a single particle of evidence in favour of the conclusion that this evolutionary process has been accompanied by any modification of the physical or the mental characters of the men who have been the subjects of it. I have not met with any grounds for suspecting that the average Englishmen of to-day are sensibly different from those that Shakespeare knew and drew." The statement, I imagine, might be very much extended. I do not suppose that the average cockney of to-day is a superior animal, physically or morally, to the average Athenian of the days of Pericles, or even, it may be, to the pre-historic savages who made flint implements for the amusement of our antiquaries. Briefly, whatever change has taken place, within historical period, has been a social change, not a change in the structure of the individual. This is surely conceivable. We need only consider, for example, how vast a change has been made in all the conditions of life by the modern applications of practical science. Whether, in other respects, we are better or worse than our forefathers, we have an enormously greater



aggregate of wealth now than we had, say, two centuries ago ; we can support four times the population, though the condition of the lowest stratum may not be better. And this amazing advance of wealth is not due to the fact that Englishmen of to-day have better brains for mathematics than the Englishmen of Newton's time ; but to the accumulation of capital, the improvement of the natural conditions of the soil, the turning to account of vast masses of material, previously neglected ; to the invention of machinery, and so forth ; all of which imply, not necessarily the very slightest improvement of natural capacity, but simply the growth of knowledge, and the fact that each generation has preserved more than it has consumed. What we call progress or civilisation, which means, whatever else it may or may not mean, a gigantic increase in the power of man over nature, is due, therefore, to the one fact that man can accumulate. He can modify the earth in such a way as to facilitate the labours of the coming generations ; he can make tools which last beyond his own time, and which themselves become, as it were, the ancestors of incomparably superior tools ; he can, moreover, accumulate and transmit knowledge, not merely the knowledge of facts, but the knowledge of scientific laws and of useful inventions, and of the right methods of investigating facts. When Newton made

a discovery, he made it for all the following generations ; and, though it may well be that no superior or even equal intellect has since arisen to carry on his work, the dwarf now stands on the shoulders of the giant. It is not simply that we know more facts. The modes of mathematical inquiry differ as much from those which Newton could employ, as the latest steam engine from the crude fire machine before the time of Watt ; and an average undergraduate can solve with ease problems which once puzzled the greatest intellects that ever appeared among men. Man, then, can accumulate ; and that simple fact enables every generation enormously to surpass its predecessors. Accumulation, again, is, of course, a form of inheritance. We are born heirs to the intellectual as well as to the material fortunes of our ancestors. But, it is obvious, this is something very different from heredity. It supposes an alteration, not in the man, but in his surroundings or his education in the widest sense ; not in his intellectual capacity, but in the knowledge which it can attain and the rules which it has worked out. In order that a man may be capable either of bequeathing or inheriting, he must have certain faculties ; he must be an observing, remembering, reasoning animal ; but he may become indefinitely richer, not from any improvement in his powers of observing and remember-

ing and using, but simply from the change in his position. People's memories, it is sometimes suggested, have been weakened by the invention of printing. But, weakened or not, we have an incomparably greater knowledge of the past than was formerly possible, because we can now keep our memories upon our bookshelves, in the form of histories and encyclopædias, and know every fact that we want to know when we want it, without troubling ourselves to fill our minds with all the knowledge that may ever be possibly useful. A library is an external and materialised memory. But without illustrating so plain a point any further, I simply take note of what it implies: that is, that, as Professor Huxley has pointed out, all that distinguishes the present state of things from the state of things in the time of Elizabeth, or, perhaps, at the time of remote Egyptian dynasties, may be due, not to any change in the individual, but to what is called the social factor. The inference from the individual to the society, or from the society to the individual, is, therefore, rigidly impossible, because, given the man, the position in which he is placed and the stage of development of the society to which he belongs, are relevant facts which exercise an incalculably great influence.

If this be true, what follows? We remark, in the

first place, that the evolution of which we speak in regard to natural history, the process by which the present population of the globe has gradually grown out of the population of remote geological epochs, is slow. The changes which it may produce are not sensible within a generation—for, indeed, the very nature of the case implies that they must take many generations—not perhaps even within such a period as is covered by all authentic history. It is not, of course, on that account to be overlooked for scientific purposes. Monkeys must have grown into men before they could begin to accumulate capital, either material or spiritual. The faculty of accumulating must itself have been developed. Only when once it was developed, another process would begin, the process of social evolution, which, however it may resemble the other, or possibly be in some sense its continuation, proceeds, at least, at a totally different rate. The difference is comparable, one may say roughly, to the difference between the speed of an express train and the speed of a four-wheeled waggon. Beneath the surface, it may be, the slower process is still continuing; men, for anything I can say to the contrary, may be acquiring larger brains and more sensitive bodies; and it is further possible, or rather obvious, that if we can do anything to facilitate this proceeding, to behave so as to give nature a better chance of

turning out better work, we ought to do so. Only nature is pretty sure to take her time about it. How far, again, one process is to be considered as a continuation of the other, or as a modification, or even as in opposition to it, is a point which I cannot now touch. What I have to say is simply this: that if we take any two periods of society, the present, for example, and that of a thousand or five thousand years ago, we shall find enormous or incalculably great differences in the social structure, in the amount of knowledge, in the character of the ethical, religious, and philosophical beliefs, and in the relations between the individuals of which the society is constructed; but between the individuals at the two periods we may find hardly any definable difference whatever. For anything we can say, we should be able, if we could move people about in time as well as in space, to exchange a thousand infants of the nineteenth century A.D., for a thousand of the nineteenth century B.C., and nobody would be able to detect the difference which would result.

Hence it follows, in my opinion, that the evolutionary process with which moralists and political philosophers have practically to deal, is what I have called the social, and not the individual process. We inherit thoughts as we inherit wealth; we inherit customs and laws and forms of worship, and indeed

our whole mental furniture ; we can add enormously to our inheritance, and can transmit the augmented fund to our descendants. But the other process of inheritance, to which the word "heredity" is taken to apply, is not, immediately at least, cumulative. We inherit the old faculties, bodily and mental, unaltered, or with infinitesimal alterations, though we live in a different environment, and are ourselves as much altered as our environment. The modern social organism is built up, if I may say so, of cells almost identical in their properties with those of the old organism, although the mode of combination gives entirely new properties to the whole, and brings out new actions and reactions among the constituent cells themselves.

I have been touching the edge of certain problems of great interest but enormous complexity, and I shall venture to indicate the difference between these views and some which have recently attracted much attention. Mr. Kidd's work upon "Social Evolution" has made the phrase popular ; but, instead of using it in my sense, he speaks as though "social evolution" involved what I have called individual evolution. In order to keep within limits, I will confine myself to one case upon which he lays great stress. It will show sufficiently why I hold his mode of reasoning to be inconclusive, Mr. Kidd has



achieved success by very excellent qualities, by remarkable literary ability, and by his uniformly high tone of moral feeling. I should, therefore, be very sorry to speak of him otherwise than respectfully. Mr. Kidd, however, chooses to maintain a thesis in which he has certainly no personal interest,—the thesis, namely, that a little stupidity may be a very good thing. This view is, perhaps, intelligible when we observe that he also maintains that the progress of the race depends upon its holding “ultra-rational,” which I think he would find it hard to distinguish from “irrational,” beliefs. In support of this view he writes a chapter to prove that “progress is not primarily intellectual”. The argument of which I have spoken is part of this proof. The Greeks, he tells us, were a race intellectually superior to ourselves. They were, so Mr. Galton informs him, two degrees above modern Englishmen in the scale of intelligence, and as superior to us as we are to the negro. And yet, says Mr. Kidd, this marvellous race died out, and no trace of its blood is now to be found in the present population of the world. Let us look shortly into the logic of this argument, and consider how far it is entitled to be regarded as scientific reasoning.

First of all, I should ask, what precisely is meant by “the Greeks”? The argument is founded partly

on the number of great thinkers, poets, and artists, in proportion to the population. Now, it is obviously essential to a scientific statement that we should know what is the population indicated. If we compare the number of great men at Athens in its best period with the number of free Athenians, we shall get one ratio; if we admit the Athenian slaves, or add Bœotia and other Greek States to our population, we get quite a different ratio. And the difference is of immense importance. The smaller the population, the higher the excellence indicated by a given number of great men; but, also, the smaller the population, the less is the wonder that it should have died out or been swallowed up in the whirlpools of political, religious, and social convulsions. A similar remark applies in regard to the period during which this race flourished. When did they begin and when did they cease to be superior to other people? Till the statement is more precise we do not even know what are the phenomena to be explained; and the case is susceptible of any number of explanations. Did the superior race cease to be prolific; or was it prolific, but of inferior descendants; and, if so, was it because it was mixed with races of an inferior stamp; or was it because its position exposed it to the attacks of more numerous enemies; or because its energy led it to attempt



impossible feats? Has it died out, or has it been swamped by other races? To answer such questions is absolutely necessary before we can say positively that the higher organisation was the cause of the decay, or that it did not cause the decay by some indirect process due to the special combination of circumstances. But to answer such questions, if they be answerable at all, would require the investigations of a lifetime, and a mastery of a whole series of studies, historical, statistical, ethnological, and so forth, in which I am an absolute ignoramus. But I cannot perceive that Mr. Kidd claims more than second-hand information.

But, secondly, there is another obvious question to which an answer is necessary. Mr. Kidd and Mr. Galton deduce their view about Greek intellect, first, from the proportion of great men. Does, then, the occurrence of a group of great men at a certain period prove a superior organisation in the race? That leads to a very familiar problem: What were the causes of what we may call the flowering times of arts and sciences? We are all familiar with the phenomenon; with the sudden display of astonishing excellence at Athens, at Florence, or in the England of Elizabeth. It seems to be the rule that processes which may have been going on quietly for centuries suddenly culminate; that artistic, poetic, or philosophic excellence becomes unprecedentedly common

---

for a generation or two, and that the impulse then dies away as rapidly. It is the kind of problem which is satisfactorily solved by the authors of university prize essays, which somehow fail to convince the world or to be republished by their writers. Are we, then, entitled to argue from the great works an organic superiority in the race? Must we suppose, for example, that Englishmen at the time of Shakespeare and Bacon and Spenser and Raleigh were an abler race than their descendants, because, when there was a very much smaller number of educated men, they produced more first-rate authors than have been produced by generations much more numerous and more generally cultivated? This seems to me at least to be a very rash hypothesis; and some of the obvious remarks made in our university essays seem to me to indicate considerations which, though not conclusive, cannot be neglected. It is clear, for example, that particular stages of intellectual progress are abnormally stimulating; that, as the last step to a pass in the mountains suddenly reveals vast prospects, while a hundred equally difficult steps before made no appreciable change, so there are mental advances which, as at the time of Bacon, seemed suddenly to disclose boundless prospects of knowledge. It is the Pisgah sight of the promised land which causes a burst of energy. Or, again, a

---

certain social condition is obviously required ; philosophers and poets may exist potentially among barbarous tribes, but they cannot get a chance to speak, and they have no opportunity of communication with other thinkers. The intellect may be impelled in various directions, some of which leave no trace of a tangible kind. The amount of intellectual power implied in building up the Roman Empire may have been as great as that implied in developing Greek art ; and in America, as we are often told, intellect turns to dollar-making, instead of book-writing. So, conversely, the outburst of power may indicate, not greater faculties, but special opportunities, or special stimulus, applied to already existing faculties. Everybody who has written an æsthetic treatise has pointed to all manner of conditions which were in this sense favourable to the Greeks. How far such conditions were sufficient I cannot even guess ; but at least an allowance must be made for them before we can argue from the achievements to the intrinsic power of the race which achieved. I do not see that it is even "proved" that the average Athenian was in the least superior in this sense to the average Englishman. It would require a lifetime of study to pronounce any opinion worth having. I fully confess that, so far as a vague impression is worth anything, it is the most obvious

impression, after looking at the Elgin marbles, that the Greeks were possessed of a finer organisation than ourselves. Still, I cannot accept as certain the quasi-mathematical formula that the Greek is to the Englishman as the Englishman to the negro.

This, however, suggests another and very difficult series of problems. Mr. Kidd is arguing against intellectual superiority. He, of course, does not argue that the general superiority of a race leads to its disappearance; but that a one-sided superiority—an improvement of one set of faculties at the expense of others—may have that result. This at once suggests a whole series of psychological problems. The intellect and the emotional nature are not two separate organs, each capable of independent development. Every mental process involves both, and neither faculty can be developed without reference to the other. Mr. Kidd accepts the conclusion that certain primitive races were as clever as ourselves, because their brains were as large. If the argument be sound, it proves equally that their emotional nature was as well developed as ours; for no one can doubt that the brain is the physical condition of feeling as well as of thought. Even the most abstract thought, as he elsewhere notices, implies certain moral qualities. Newton remarked that he was superior to other men, not because his

intellect was clearer, but because he attended more persistently to his problems. The statement, I think, involves a fallacy. Newton himself, no doubt, did better the longer he kept a problem before him. He inferred, unjustifiably, that of two different men, the one who could keep up his attention longest would be the best. That does not follow. The difference may indeed be moral as well as intellectual; and it is quite true that a power of sustained attention is of the highest importance in mathematics, and that that power supposes a moral quality; but, conversely, the power of attention probably implies also the power of clear intellectual vision. A muddle-headed man would find attention useless. This is, of course, still clearer in the case where the mind is exercised upon questions of human interest. The statesman and the dramatist both depend upon their power of sympathy and the strength of their emotions, as much as upon their logical capacity. To feel for others I must imagine their position: if I imagine it, I can hardly avoid feeling for them. "Altruism" is the product, in other words, of a process both intellectual and moral.

Now, remembering this, we see the difficulty of pronouncing upon the nature of the Greek organisation. Perhaps the commonest of all remarks

upon Greek work is the symmetry and harmony, the "all-roundness," if I may say so, of the development implied. Poetry and philosophy, art and science seem to be so blended in their work that we cannot tell which faculty is predominant. What, then, is the inequality of development which is essential to Mr. Kidd's argument? They were wanting, he seems to answer, in "altruism". What does this mean? The astonishing power of the Greeks was certainly as conspicuous in poetry and art as in anything else; and that power surely implies development of the emotional as well as of the intellectual nature. By a defect of "altruism," I take him to mean that these emotions did not flow along the channel of general philanthropy. They were wanting then, as I should put it, rather in cosmopolitanism than in altruism. If altruism means care for something outside yourself, where could we find better examples of altruism than at Thermopylæ or Marathon? Was it not due to Greek altruism in this form (some historians would say) that Mr. Kidd is not now living under the rule of a Persian Satrap? The altruism, no doubt, meant an intense and patriotic devotion to a small State, or an interest in Greek as against barbarian, and was compatible with much brutality to individuals and acquiescence in slavery. But this does

not indicate an absence of the emotions themselves, but simply their confinement within narrow limits, by the conditions under which they were placed. Slavery, for example, is abominable; but I see no reason for supposing that the slave-holders in America were worse men by innate constitution than their opponents. They were corrupted by their position.

This, in any case, leads to another problem. Were the Greeks more or less altruistic than other races? If you could show that altruistic races had survived while the Greeks perished, there might be a presumption that the want of altruism was the cause of their decay. But this again does not seem to be the case. Hardly one of the ancient races, indeed, has survived unvaried. The Romans were at least as brutal as the Greeks, and, one would say, as far from "altruistic". Yet they overpowered the Greeks. How, then, can it be inferred that the Greeks perished because of defective altruism? The struggle for existence was between races equally defective to all appearance in that quality; and it must be a sophistry to signalise its absence in one as the cause of its disappearance. There is, indeed, one race to which every one would turn as the most prominent example of survival, namely, the Jews. The Jews



have enormous merits and great intellectual endowments; but can anybody say that they were altruistic in the sense of being cosmopolitan? Are they not conspicuous, beyond any race, for the narrower forms of altruism, rejection of a cosmopolitan creed, even when it arose among them, and exclusive devotion to the welfare of their own people? I think that it would be perfectly easy to argue that the Greeks died out just because of their cosmopolitan and therefore dispersive tendencies, and that the Jews have held out from a judicious adherence to narrower views of self-preservation. But personally I regard all such "arguments" as really belonging to the extra-scientific regions of rhetorical illustration.

This suggests one other point which requires consideration. Mr. Kidd regards it as proved that progress has been due to the Christian religion, which revealed the new moral doctrine. The Christian religion introduced, it seems, that belief in the supernatural which is essential to altruism. It seems to me to be inconsistent with his own principles, that he should attribute progress to what is essentially, on his own showing, an intellectual change: that is, to a change in belief and even to a change which, in comparison with the old polytheism, was distinctly sceptical and rationalistic. But one point



is clear. The introduction of Christianity may be interpreted more consistently in a totally different way. The Greek who became a Christian was not provided with a new set of emotions, but his emotions were directed into new channels. He ceased to care for Athens, because Athens had ceased to be an independent State; he began to be cosmopolitan when he was forced to be part of a cosmopolitan empire. The important distinction was no longer the distinction between Athenian and Spartan, but between the different classes in the world-wide system. That is to say, the "altruism" which came in with Christianity was not the product of a new dogma suddenly dropped from heaven; but of the new social condition, which made it inevitable that the forces which previously stimulated a local patriotism should now exert themselves nearer a cosmopolitan organisation. This is, of course, a commonplace; but, for that reason, it should not be simply ignored. It suggests one other consequence of Mr. Kidd's theory. It is proved, he says, that the progress of the Western world is due to Christianity. His "proof," as I suppose, is that the States which have sprung out of the old Empire of the West have been Christian and have progressed. How, then, about the Empire of the East? If the great Kingdoms of the West are the unique example of progress, what is the unique

example of decay? Surely, the regions where Christian dogmatic theology was defended by Athanasius and Chrysostom. If you wish to point out a region where the race has actually gone backwards, you would refer to the Turkish Empire. Why, if Christianity was the sole cause of progress in one quarter, was it comparable with complete decay in the other? Does the Eastern theory about the *filioque* explain it? Or were the Mohammedans more "altruistic" than the Christians? Or is it that it is absurd, especially upon Mr. Kidd's own doctrine, to assign the dogmatic creed of a race as the sole cause of its character and its success in the struggle for existence?

I do not lay any stress upon the argument, except in a negative sense. I do not see, that is, how Mr. Kidd can make his theory fit the facts. But I infer one other remark. It is impossible to divine the causes of the rise and fall of empires, the success or decay of a race, from any of these sweeping generalisations about ill-defined qualities. If we ask why the Greeks died out, we should have to take into account another and a totally different set of considerations: what I may call the accidents of their position. We should have to consider all the arguments by which historians have tried to explain the events; the facts of physical geography, for

example, which account for the division into small separate States; the relations of the Greeks to the Eastern races on the one side, and to the Romans on the other; and, briefly, to all the material conditions, those different from the intrinsic character of the race, by which the whole course of political development and of the conflict between different peoples, is moulded and directed into particular courses. I do not say, for I cannot guess, what would be the result of such an inquiry; but I think it just as possible that it would lead us to wonder at the persistence of the Greek States for so long a period, as that it would lead us to wonder at their disappearance. Our conclusion might be, that nothing but the astonishing intellectual powers of the Greeks enabled them to play so great a part in the world's history, not that their intellectual superiority was the cause of their decay.

I consider, therefore, that the alleged fact is stated so vaguely that we have no distinct problem set before us; that we don't know what is the process to be explained; that the suggested intellectual superiority is doubtful, at least in degree: that the excess of intellectual above other development, which the superiority is supposed to have created, is not proved, and, still less, that such excess was more conspicuous among the Greeks than among their

rivals; that, even if it existed, it is not proved that it would have produced the effect ascribed to it; and, finally, that the other causes which undoubtedly operated, are simply overlooked. I confess, therefore, that the whole argument seems to me to illustrate the danger of rashly applying certain scientific formulæ,—themselves, perhaps, still doubtful,—to new and exceedingly complex questions. If Darwin had reasoned in this light-hearted way, no one would have been moved by his conclusions.

But I must still add, what brings me back to my point, that even if the proposition were proved, it would not establish the conclusion. It may be, that races of abnormal intellectual development are at a disadvantage in the struggle for existence. That does not prove that “progress is not primarily intellectual”. Buckle, who argued that progress was due to intellectual causes exclusively, always assumed that human nature was constant, or that the faculties did not change. Though I do not accept his view, any more than Mr. Kidd’s, I do not see that he was inconsistent. I take the most obvious case to illustrate the point. No one can doubt that one of the most important influences in modern social evolution was the set of mechanical contrivances devised by Arkwright and Watt and their contemporaries. Without them, the enormous

development of great cities, of a population of artisans, and of the bringing together of all quarters of the globe, would have been impossible. The inventions, again, were due to no moral purpose in the inventors. They wanted to make money, and represented what is called (I do not say justly) the most egoistic impulse of modern times. One condition, then, of the great social change was essentially intellectual. This does not mean that Watt was a cleverer man than Archimedes. I don't know whether he was or not; but it does mean that the mechanical sciences had improved; and, consequently, that Watt, though not possessed of intrinsically greater powers, was, in this direction, a more intellectual person. He had inherited the truths discovered by Archimedes and many generations of successors. That science should be efficient, it is not required that men should be greater geniuses than their predecessors; but simply that they should know more of the facts and laws of nature, and have, so to speak, better intellectual tools. Mr. Kidd thinks that the inability of a savage to count three does not prove him to be stupid, only to be without certain rules discovered by the higher races. Yet, he will not deny that by the help of arithmetic we can work out sums inconceivable to the savage; and that our power affects our whole social position. Does not the existence of a currency

affect mankind ; and if we could not count, could we make use of it ?

I therefore hold that in many cases the causes of progress are "primarily intellectual". The mechanical discoveries of which I have spoken have revolutionised the whole world. I agree, indeed, fully, that the causes are not exclusively intellectual. A certain social condition—the existence, to say nothing more, of peace and order over wide regions—was as necessary as the intellectual condition to the development of commerce and manufactures. This, of course, implies the growth of corresponding sentiments, including, no doubt, what Mr. Kidd means by altruism. But the change may, and, I fancy, generally does, originate in intellectual movements. The new ideas shake the world. Reason, says Mr. Kidd, is the great disintegrating and egoistic force. I should say that reasoning is essentially altruistic: my discoveries are mentally discoveries for you ; I cannot keep a truth for my private consumption, as I can keep a material product. But it is true, to use eulogistic instead of dyslogistic language, that reason is the great force of movement, and breaks up the old social conditions, not only by getting rid of the ultra-rational, but by spreading the power of the rational ; and therefore it inevitably brings about

a state of things in which the old moral impulses have to run in new channels; a narrow patriotism, to widen into a regard for the interests of other races; and the class distinctions which repose upon no reasonable ground, to disappear in favour of a wider humanity. When we are arguing about an organism, it is surely a mistake to fix our minds upon one aspect of the problem: to deny with Buckle the moral evolution, and with Mr. Kidd to disparage the intellectual evolution.

Mr. Kidd's doctrine appears to me, though, of course, not to him, to be eminently discouraging. If he worked it out logically, his argument, I think, would come to this: that the progress of mankind has resulted from the accidental, that is, inexplicable, appearance of a quality called altruism, which gave to those who possessed it an advantage in the struggle for existence. It would be far more consistent to say that the religious dogma was determined by this new element, than that it was the cause. Altruism, again, was only produced in effect on this hypothesis by the slow results of a process necessarily lasting through many generations; and our only hope must be in a slow organic change of the primary characteristics of mankind. Now, it is, of course, true that those characteristics, whatever they may be, impose



---

definite limits upon our progress. The raw material limits the product; and the new-born baby is the raw material of society, as wool is of cloth: you cannot convert it into tissue of gold. So much is undeniable. We, it is said, have been developed out of an arboreal animal, and I have sometimes regretted that we were not developed out of a flying animal. The course of civilisation would have been very different if we had not been forced to come into contact by crawling and swimming, instead of the much freer methods of aerial travelling. However, as things were, the choice was apparently between wings and hands; and if we could not have both, perhaps hands were preferable, and may in time lead to flying machines. The speculation, it may be, borders upon the fanciful. I mention it only by way of illustrating the inevitable conditions imposed upon us by "heredity". We have to be content with walking instead of flying; and similarly we have to be content with having only the five senses of our forefathers, and the various old-fashioned apparatuses for eating, drinking, digesting, and so forth, which they unconsciously elaborated. No material change can possibly be made in this system within any period to which we can look forward. To regret these limitations is just as



idle as to regret that we cannot fly, or that we cannot extend our voyages to the moon. They are part of the primary data of the problem with which we have to deal; and to regret that that problem was not differently contrived is to propose to set about reconstructing the universe. But when we go on to ask how far this limits any possibilities of achieving really desirable, because distinctly conceivable results, I say that we have ample room for hopes large enough to animate our loftiest desires. We inherit, it is true, certain faculties which scarcely alter, or do not perceptibly alter, for the better. We do not see or smell or hear better than the savage, and in some of these faculties we are surpassed by the dog. We inherit also certain intellectual powers, and, if they improve, the improvement is so slow as to be perceptible only after many generations. But then this intellect carries with it another power,—the power of inheriting thoughts, beliefs, methods of reasoning and rules of conduct. And, therefore, to the organic evolution is added the social evolution, which enables us to accumulate our vast spiritual inheritance. The inheritance is everything, or almost everything, that makes the distinctions between the civilised races of to-day and the wandering savages who roamed the fens and the

forests which were supplanted by fields and towns. And this, I think, makes room enough for all reasonable aspirations, though it certainly does not open any prospect that we shall ever become gods or angels.

Thus, for example, we look with sorrow, sometimes with something like despair, upon the masses of the criminal or degraded population which grovels at the base of modern society. If we were bound to say, the crime and the stupidity are the necessary expression of the shape of the skull and the organisation of the brain; if we had therefore to infer that the only possible remedy is by so modifying the struggle for existence that the inferior forms may be killed off and a better breed of humanity take the place of the present; we should certainly feel that we were confined within very narrow limits. I do not for a moment say, that such considerations may not point to important practical conclusions. I should be very glad to hear of any practical suggestions for so applying these doctrines as to increase the probability that the next generation may be stronger, healthier, and more intelligent than the present. But I also assert that the most obvious facts also show that there are enormous possibilities of progress without supposing any such organic transformation. If all that makes the

difference between the England of to-day and the England of two or three centuries back is the presence of the social factor, not of the organic change, it shows in the most striking way the vast educability of mankind, even without any ultimate change of human nature. We must all, I think, have been impressed lately by one of the most singular phenomena which have ever taken place in history. We have ourselves seen the transformation of the Japanese—whom we so recently regarded as semi-barbarians—acquire almost at a bound all the arts of Western civilisation, and able not only to use with singular effect that most complex and delicate piece of machinery which forms a modern warship, but to adopt systems of military organisation and the strategy of a Moltke. That is not because the Japanese have changed any one of their physical characteristics, for they are the very same men who the other day were chiefly known to us as performing the “happy despatch”. They have changed simply because they were able to assimilate European results. Now, if that be a perfectly possible result, consistently with all the so-called laws of heredity, the same laws cannot be inconsistent with changes of a similar character within ourselves. You take a thorough ruffian,—a drinking, rowdy, fighting

---

brute, who has stamped his wife or his friend into a jelly. You say that he is an illustration of slavism, or the reproduction of an ancient type which once had its place among his ancestors. The fact may be quite true; that he is, for example, acting still in the spirit of those ancient Vikings who have been idealised by our romantic writers; but who, when they landed in an old British village, behaved pretty much as the modern roughs or some of those noble blackguards who are described in Mr. Rudyard Kipling's novels. But if you mean that he is divided from civilised beings by an impassable gulf, and is doomed to be a scoundrel by the shape of his skull, I venture to dispute the assumption. The Viking in a generation or two became the Norman knight, capable of the highest cultivation of his time; and even the rough, according to Mr. Rudyard Kipling, is capable, under judicious discipline, of developing some very fine qualities, chiefly, it is true, in the shape of devotion to his colours. To wean him from some of his weaknesses it is probably necessary to catch him rather younger. All, however, that I desire to say, for the present, is this—as it seems to me—very undeniable fact: that the difference between a civilised man and a barbarian, between the highest types of modern life and the

apparently irreclaimable brutes who are exhibited in our police-courts, is not dependent upon the mark of the beast irreclaimably fixed upon them at their birth; but to certain later influences, which may or may not be brought to bear upon them effectually. There is nothing, for example, in the doctrine of heredity inconsistent with the belief that if such influences could be properly directed, the standard, say, of sobriety and prudence among the lowest classes might be improved, as much as the standard of the same virtues has been improved in classes above them. The consequences of such a change would, I suspect, be incomparably greater than the consequences of whole systems of laws regulating the hours of labour and whole armies of official inspectors.

But into this I need not go; and I have only one thing to say in conclusion. I have spoken of the enormous results of what we call progress and civilisation. That they are in one sense enormous is, I suppose, undeniable. That the power which we generally describe as the command of man over nature has been immensely increased is too palpable a fact to be denied; that there has been a corresponding change in many political and social respects is a fact which I only mention without seeking to say how far it has been in all respects

---

a change for the better. Further, I urge that this change, whatever it is, has not been due to a change in the individual constitution, but to a change in the social factor. And, this being so, I simply suggest that, considering how vast is the total change thus effected, we may reasonably hope, or, at the very least, we may reasonably endeavour to justify the hope, that a change of great magnitude may be brought about in those directions where we all have to regret the survival or even the development of so much that is melancholy: of regeneration going on alongside of amelioration. I think that the doctrine of heredity is sometimes interpreted in such a way as to suggest the hopelessness or at least the extreme difficulty of introducing any sensible improvement within any limited time; and what I have tried to urge is that, if properly understood, it does not in the least degree tend to justify such forebodings, or to imply that we are to abandon ourselves to a demoralising fatalism.

## PUNISHMENT.

I INVITE you to consider a rather dry problem. I ventured to select this topic because it has lately been my duty to occupy myself with certain legal writings, which, perhaps, took me a little beyond my depth. They touched, however, problems which are common to the lawyer and to the moralist. Although not a lawyer, I am interested in some moral problems which have also a legal aspect. What I propose to do this evening is, to consider certain questions which lie in the region common to both provinces of inquiry, and especially this question: What is the true ethical theory of punishments inflicted by the criminal law? How, and in what sense, are they to be regarded as just? There is, obviously, a relation between the two codes—moral and legal. Murder is both a sin and a crime: a breach of the moral law, and of the laws of every civilised country. Yet, there is one broad and deep distinction between the two systems of law. The moral law is essentially concerned with a man's motives, To say that a man's conduct is



---

wicked, is necessarily also to say that it is the action of a bad man, or due to evil passions. Murder is wicked, as it is the manifestation of the murderer's hatred of his neighbour. The criminal law, on the other hand, has to deal, in the first instance, with the external facts. It contemplates, primarily, what a man does, not what he is. It does not attempt to punish every man who hates his neighbour, but every man who has, in fact, killed, whether the action springs from hatred or some other motive. Every one who deliberately kills, unless the act falls under certain definite exceptions, is guilty of murder. This, of course, does not imply that the moral aspect is of no account. The exceptions are so arranged that the legal classification corresponds roughly to the moral classification. Under certain exceptions, killing is regarded as justifiable homicide, and under others, it is only manslaughter, and, therefore, receives none, or a slighter penalty. The coincidence between the codes may thus be very close. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the action condemned by the criminal law will be condemned by the moralist. The man who is legally guilty of murder is also, almost invariably, guilty of a great moral offence. Although, again, the moral law applies to large classes of conduct, which are not within the cognisance of the criminal law, it is, at



least, plainly desirable that the criminal law should condemn nothing which is not also morally wrong. The sway of the moral law is universal; it applies to all conduct, and, of course, to the conduct of legislators and judges: they and the law which they define and apply should be consistent with the general law of right and wrong. They and all of us are bound not to make virtue more difficult nor vice easier.

But, further, the questions as to the relations between the two codes arise in various directions. It is obvious that the criminal law has to employ very rough and ready methods. It cannot estimate, with any accuracy, the degree of immorality implied by any given action. It cannot, and it does not attempt to, look closely into the secrets of a man's heart. It cannot inquire, as a rule, how far a man's crime is the result of bad education or bad surroundings; how far it implies thorough corruption or only superficial faults of temper, or a misunderstanding of some fact or doctrine. It cannot take into account a number of metaphysical or psychological considerations which are connected with the theory of moral responsibility. To settle such points you would have to empanel a jury of philosophers, and the only thing of which you could be certain would be, that such a jury would never agree upon a verdict,

---

Again, there are whole classes of virtues and vices with which the criminal law is not concerned. Ingratitude, to take the common example, is a grave vice, but one which it would be absurd to punish legally. Not only would such an attempt involve impossible inquiries, but the attempt would be self-defeating. If the duty of gratitude to a benefactor were turned into a legal obligation, gratitude proper would cease to exist. To confer a benefit would be the same thing as to acquire a right to repayment. A man who allows his best friend to starve, or to go to the workhouse, may be, morally, far worse than a thief; but you could not punish him legally, without adopting a principle which, even if practicable, would, so far as it operated, be destructive of all disinterested friendship. The law, again, can deal only with criminals who are found out. What proportion they may bear to the whole class of moral offenders is not discoverable; but it is, at least, safe to say that, for every man whom you convict of a crime, you must leave unpunished, because undetected, another sinner who is equally deserving of punishment. And, finally, it is apparently impossible to say, upon any intelligible grounds, what should be the proportion between crime and punishment. How many years' imprisonment does a man deserve for putting out his neighbour's eye? I do not

see how such a rule of three can be stated. The good old theory of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, seems to suggest a possible criterion. But it was difficult to carry out. Deloraine, in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, has, as he points out, killed Musgrove's brother; but, on the other hand, Musgrove has killed Deloraine's nephew, and, besides, got a thousand marks ransom out of Deloraine himself. Is the account to be regarded as accurately balanced? Is one brother just equal to a nephew plus a thousand marks? The theory, of course, is an application of an inappropriate analogy. If we regard crime simply as a case of private injury, we may say that it is fair that the wrong-doer should restore the thing that he has taken, and so put matters where they were before. But this is obviously to take a view which is quite inapplicable in most cases, and in all cases becomes inadequate when we take the moral view, and regard crime as an offence against society—not simply as a wrong to another individual.

For such reasons, it is apparently impossible to say that a legal punishment can be just, in the full sense in which the moralist would use the words. No doubt we may say,—and we wish that we could always say,—that a man “deserves” what he has got; and that implies that we recognise as desirable some satisfaction to our sense of justice. And, of

course, too, we demand that justice should be done in another sense of the word; that the case, for example, should be impartially investigated; that a man should not be punished severely because he is poor, or because he is unpopular, or let off easily because he is a private friend of the judge. Such demands mean that justice should not be perverted by applying irrelevant considerations; but they leave our previous questions untouched. The criminal law, from its nature, cannot impose equal penalties upon all men who are equally wicked; but only upon those who have made themselves liable: and that always involves elements of accident; it cannot take into account at all some of the elements upon which the depth of moral depravity essentially depends; and it is, at least, very difficult to say what specific meaning can be given to the proportion between crime and the suffering imposed upon the criminal.

If, then, the legislative action must, of necessity, be very imperfect from the moral point of view, we may try what will be the effect of dismissing the moral question altogether, or, at least, reducing it to a secondary place. We may, that is, consider crime not in so far as immoral, but in so far as mischievous. Here we have the doctrine worked out very consistently by Bentham and his followers. Pain, they said, is an evil, the only evil; pleasure, a good,

and the only good. To inflict needless pain—pain which does not cause a balance of pleasure—upon any one, be he a good man or be he a bad man, is, so far, wrong. For the same reason, it is justifiable, and, indeed, right, to inflict pain, so far as it prevents some greater evil. Hence, you should punish criminals just so far as the pain which you inflict is less than the pain which you prevent. It is wrong to give a single useless pang even to the worst of men. If (according to a sentiment attributed to Bentham) a fine of five shillings would prevent a man from committing murder, it would be wrong to fine him seven shillings and sixpence. This gives a justification of punishment, in so far as deterrent. It is obviously connected with another doctrine. A man is the best judge of his own pleasures and pains. Therefore, in so far as a man's actions affect himself alone, they are not to be forbidden by the law. We may think them bad or degrading; but so long as they do not affect others, the fact that a man chooses them is a proof that they give him pleasure; and we shall, therefore, only diminish the sum of happiness by interfering. Now, it is plain that this distinction does not draw the line between what is morally bad or good. Every habit which affects a man's own character, affects, also, his capacity to fulfil his duties to others. But this theory overlooks immorality, except

---

so far as it happens to involve certain extraneous consequences. We are, upon this showing, to punish a criminal precisely in the same spirit as we are to abate a nuisance. The thief is to be suppressed, as we are to extirpate a mischievous weed, and to be suppressed by just as much severity as is required for the purpose. The drunkard, so long as he confines himself to making a beast of himself in his own room, does his neighbours no direct injury, and must be left to enjoy the pleasure which is shown, because he chooses it, to be a pleasure to him. Of this theory, it may, I think, be said that, however imperfect, it is tolerably consistent, and, moreover, that it undoubtedly does express one legitimate end of punishment. There can be no doubt, that is, that the punishment of murderers may be rightly defended, among other grounds, at any rate, on the ground that it discourages the practice; though we may not fully agree with the famous saying of the judge, 'You are not hanged for stealing sheep, but hanged in order that sheep may not be stolen'. And, further, though there are various difficulties about the distinction between "self-regarding" and "extra-regarding" conduct, we must also, I think, allow, in general terms, that the fact that a man's conduct has a direct and assignable influence upon his neighbour's happiness, must always be one reason,



and, frequently, the only sufficient reason, for suppressing it by legal penalties.

This doctrine of simple deterrence, however, seems, to most critics, to be insufficient. It omits the moral element too completely. When a man is punished for some revolting offence, we are not simply providing him and his like with reasons for abstaining in future. We are, as a fact, exposing him to infamy, sometimes more painful to bear than the immediate penalty, and are thus, in fact, invoking the sanction of the moral sentiment. Therefore, it is urged, we must still, whether we like it or not, be moralists. The purely utilitarian argument has omitted one element of the calculation. The punishment not only deters offenders, but gratifies the feeling of resentment to moral indignation, which has been approved by many moralists. Hence, it is urged, besides the deterrent theory, we must make room for the vindictive theory. It is legitimate and right to hate crime, and, therefore, to hate criminals; and legal punishments are defensible, not merely as adding to the motives for refraining from crime, but as gratifying the desire for revenge, which, in early ages, was assumed in the rude modes of putting down violence, and which, even now, should be not eradicated but confined within legal channels and directed towards the desirable ends.

Postponing, for the present, a consideration of this proposed emendation, let us consider, a little more closely, the objection made to the theory of deterrence. In what way does it come into direct conflict with a moral theory of punishment? It looks upon immorality as mischievous, or as diminishing happiness; and upon the utilitarian view immorality means the diminution of happiness. Now, without discussing ultimate moral questions, I may assume that, for practical purposes, this seems to be a sufficiently tenable position. After all, we admit, to whatever school we belong, that crime is mischievous, and, whatever deeper meaning may be assigned to it, may be considered in that light by the legislator. He cannot—certainly he ought not to—forbid actions which do no harm to anybody, or which nobody, at the time and place, feels to be injurious to happiness. Even, therefore, if utilitarianism be unsatisfactory as an ultimate theory, it may represent adequately the point of view of the practical legislator. He tries to suppress violence and fraud because, as a fact, they cause what their victims unanimously agree to be painful consequences; and he need not look any further for a reason. People, it is said, have very different standards of pleasure. Still, we all dislike having our throats cut or our pockets picked; and that fact supplies a sufficient ground upon



which to base the whole criminal law. When we go a little further, a point of divergence may be noticed, a short consideration of which may help to clear the case. Let us assume the legitimate end of all punishment to be deterrence. It will follow, that we must annex as a consequence to crimes an adequate counterpoise, and a counterpoise not more than adequate to the criminal's motives. The fine to be paid must be just sufficient to prevent the transgression. Now, it has been urged, this necessarily implies a conflict with morality. The degree of moral guilt implied in a given crime varies inversely as the temptation. The greater the inducement to the offence, the less the wickedness shown in committing the offence. A man may have enough virtue to refrain from a gratuitous injustice, although he has not virtue enough to resist a large bribe, or the threats of a man in power. But, if the legislator is to provide simply a counterpoise, he will have to follow the opposite rule. The greater the temptation, the greater must be the force of the motive which must be added to counterbalance the temptation. If there be a crime by which a man might make a million of money, you must, if you would prevent it, hold out the prospect of such pains as would, in his estimation, be cheaply avoided at the sacrifice of a million ; or, making allowance for the uncertainty of detection,

by the sacrifice of more than a million. But if, by the same crime, he only got a five-pound note, the prospect of paying a hundred pounds in case of detection might be a sufficient preservative of his honesty. Yet, the man who is tempted by the million gives less proof of dishonesty than the man who commits the same crime for a paltry five pounds. Therefore the punishment must be increased, as the wickedness is less.

I must first set aside one ambiguity which perplexes this argument. When we speak of a temptation as varying, we may mean one of two very different things. To say that I am more "tempted" than you to commit a given crime, may mean that the gain expected by me is itself greater; or, it may mean that I am more predisposed to the crime. I may be more tempted, let us say, to poison my uncle than you are to poison yours. That may mean that my uncle is a rich old sinner and I am his heir, whereas your uncle is a poor saint and you will get nothing by his death. Or it may mean that I am more tempted because, our uncles being alike, I am spiteful, and you affectionate, by nature. In the first case, to say that I am under the stronger temptation would, perhaps, tend to alleviate the gravity of my crime; in the second, it would simply be another way of saying that I was the greater brute. In both

cases, of course, it is true that the greater temptation would require the greater counterpoise. In one case, this only means that the worse the man, the stronger the restraints which he requires; and, if you could make different laws for bad men and good, it would follow that the bad would require the heaviest penalties. But this does not conflict with the moral view. It is no excuse for a murderer to say, "I am so blood-thirsty that I really could not help murdering". No contradiction to morality arises from punishing his crime more severely. In the other case alone,—the case in which we made distinctions founded upon the difference of surrounding circumstances,—it is true that we should, from the point of view of simple deterrence, require heavier penalties where the temptations were greater, and, therefore, the intrinsic malevolence proved to exist less.

For most purposes, this argument seems to have very little practical application. The law is made for people in general; we cannot have one law for bad men and another for good; partly because good and bad people do not carry about tangible marks of their quality written upon their faces. No doubt, indeed, the atrocity of a crime is recognised, if not by the general law, by the nature of the sentence. An assault may show unnatural ferocity or merely a rather excessive warmth of temper; and, though

the offence may be forbidden under the same clause of the criminal law, the judge may be empowered to give sentences of varying severity, varying more or less according to the moral depravity implied. So far, the worst offences (in a moral sense) get the heaviest punishment; and the deterring influence is rightly exerted by proportioning the penalty to the temptation, that is, to the predisposition to crime. The other case, again, requires some qualification. It is not true, as an absolute proposition, that the criminality is always, or generally, diminished, in proportion to the greatness of the temptation; for we must remember that both the temptation and the crime will generally be greater in proportion to the amount of mischief inflicted. It is more tempting, no doubt, to appropriate a thousand pounds than a shilling; but we cannot infer that the man who takes the larger sum is, therefore, less wicked; that he has a conscience which would have kept him honest under the smaller temptation, and has only yielded to the greater. Compare, for example, the case of the petty pilferer who appropriates my watch, with the case of the man of business who appropriates securities worth many thousand pounds and ruins widows and orphans by the dozen. We should all agree, I imagine, that the perpetrator of the more gigantic fraud would require the stronger deterring

motive to be kept straight. He is playing for heavy stakes, and we cannot hold out too strong a threat of infamy and suffering, if our aim is simply to prevent the crime. But neither, if we consider him from the purely moral point of view, would it be fair to argue that he was a better man than the pick-pocket, because the plunder which tempted him was greater. The opposite, I fancy, would be true. He shows a callousness to human suffering, and an amount of deliberate hypocrisy and treachery which proves him to be not only the more dangerous, but the more thoroughly corrupt of the two. The two ends of providing a sufficient counterpoise and of punishing the worst men most severely, would, therefore, coincide in this case also; and the argument that the greater temptation implies less wickedness is plainly inapplicable.

Without going further into this, which may briefly indicate some of the perplexities involved, I may mention certain cases in which there seems to be a real divergence of the two principles. There are cases in which the temptation may be fairly held to lessen guilt, and in which punishment has, notwithstanding, been made severer in consequence. The criminal law of the last century, for example, imposed a penalty of death upon persons who stole certain kinds of property left in specially exposed positions. The ease

---

of taking it would very possibly tempt to theft men who would elsewhere be honest ; and it was sought to compensate for the strength of the temptation by more savage punishment of those who yielded to it. Or, again, there are certain problems of a similar kind connected with political offences. A man who gets up a rebellion from sincere political motives is generally far better morally than the man who gets up a rebellion for the sake, say, of simple plunder. Ought the motive to be allowed as an extenuation of the offence ? It ought, it may be said, from a moral point of view ; but, from the point of view of simple deterrence, we might rather consider that the patriotic rebel is the more dangerous person of the two, and, therefore, requires the prospect of at least as heavy a punishment to keep him quiet. So, again, it has been asked, whether it should be admitted as an excuse for a rioter, that he has joined in violent courses under threats from the riotous mob. This is, of course, an excuse from the moralist's point of view ; the man is only attacking the police in order to save his own house from being burnt, not from a disorderly or disaffected spirit. But it is replied, from the deterring point of view, that, if such an excuse be allowed, you are ceasing to threaten at the precise moment when the threats are most required. If the law is not to press from one side,



all the pressure will come from the other, and every argument will be in favour of joining the side of disorder. Hence, it is argued, we ought to proportion the punishment, not to the offence, but to the temptation.

Now, I may say, very briefly, that such a divergence of the two principles appears to me to be possible; and, further, that cases may be put in which it might be necessary to deter, at all hazards, even to the neglect of moral considerations. A general who is defending a town must sometimes burn the houses of innocent people, without stopping to consider whether they can ever be compensated; and I think that there may be analogous cases even in regard to law, where *cases but* the consideration of the absolute necessity of putting down mischievous conduct may override the normal moral considerations. ✓ But the general answer is, I think, different, and may help to clear the principle. The law to which I have referred, for the protection of exposed property, obviously suggests one remark. The true remedy for the evil would have been not to increase the penalty, but to increase the protection. You ought to have provided more watchmen, or to have forbidden owners to put temptation in the way of their neighbours, and not to have tried to make the hangman do the work of the policeman. So our ancestors erred when they protected their fields, not by putting

up fences, but by setting mantraps to mutilate occasional trespassers. In that, as in other cases, the mistake is to confuse between the deterring influence of punishment and the preventive influence of protective measures. Arguments, questionable when used on behalf of punishment considered as deterring, are perfectly applicable to the preventive measures. It is obviously right that such measures should be proportioned to the temptation. When a starving man steals a loaf, he is not so bad as a man who steals when he is not starving. We should, therefore, think it morally wrong to punish him as severely. But, if we thought that he ought not to have the loaf, we should take stronger precautions in proportion to the probable temptation. If, for example, we were sending supplies to relieve a starving district, it would be clearly right to send such a force with them as might prevent their appropriation by the strongest, or the first comers. But, at the same time, we should also think it right to save the men from temptation, by providing as much as possible against the danger of starvation. So, again, it would be monstrous to punish a poor man more severely than a duke, for stealing a watch; but, as a matter of prudence, I should take more precautions if I were dining in a poor public-house, than if I were dining in a ducal palace.

/



This suggests the true application of another doctrine, about the responsibility of society. Society, it is sometimes said, has no right to punish, because it ought to have suppressed the causes of crime. This doctrine is often stated very illogically, and would sanction a great deal of false sentimentalism. If society includes many corrupt and dangerous elements, that is no reason at all for not suppressing them by all available means. But, no doubt, it is a very good and sufficient reason for trying, as far as possible, to remove the cause as well as the effects ; for getting rid of the temptations to crime, and training people so as to make them less disposed to crime, instead of simply punishing more severely those who have yielded to temptation and given play to instincts which have not been properly disciplined. This applies conspicuously to the case of the political criminal. It is generally essential to the welfare of a nation, that order should be preserved by a settled government. It is the duty of every government, not only to crush resistance, but to take such precautions as will make resistance hopeless. But a correlative duty is suggested when a rebellion actually occurs, and especially a rebellion which excites the sympathy of otherwise moral people. Such a case, that is, affords the strongest presumption that there are real grievances to be redressed, and that the rebel

should not be confounded with the vulgar criminal. It may be, and often is, quite necessary to shoot him down, so long as he is actively attacking authority ; but, when he is disarmed, he cannot be regarded simply as a thief or murderer, but as a man who has given a useful, though a disagreeable, hint that the times are out of joint.

I have gone so far into these questions—which might lead to a great many other problems of legal casuistry—with the desire of bringing out one essential part of the question. The difficulties which have arisen point, I think, to the impossibility of treating the problem exclusively, from a simple consideration of the deterring influence of punishment. That, however, remains an essential element. If the sole reason for punishing a sheep-stealer be not the prevention of sheep-stealing, that is, at least, a very excellent reason as far as it goes. But it seems to me an insufficient reason from the moral point of view, and, in particular, to fail in assigning a sufficiently distinct ground for determining the desirable degree of punishment. The principle was advocated as limiting the severity of the old laws ; but it is not quite easy to define the limit suggested. There is a necessary clumsiness about the method. A punishment only becomes operative in the cases in which the threat has failed to deter. The fact that a man has

committed a crime demonstrates the inadequacy of the system in his case ; we have not given him a sufficient motive for abstaining. When Bentham says, that if a fine of five shillings would prevent a murder, you ought not to fine the murderer seven and sixpence, he says what is, in a sense, obviously true. If I could prevent a murder, or, indeed, achieve any other desirable object, for a given sum, why should I throw away another penny? But the fine is not inflicted till somebody has committed a murder, and, in that case, the threat of fining has obviously failed. The question arises, therefore, how far am I to go? Am I to go on raising the tariff till murder becomes altogether obsolete? But we have already got as far as capital punishment, without achieving that result. And, if we consider the case upon this method, we begin to find a difficulty in the method of calculation. We are to compare the pain inflicted upon the criminal with the pain saved to the victim. But the greater the pain inflicted, the smaller, according to the assumption made, will be the number of criminals, and the greater the number of victims saved. If we could adopt the Draconic system, and be sure of punishing every crime with death, crime ought to disappear ; for hardly anybody would break the law if he were quite certain of the gallows. But, in that case, the pain, both of the

criminal and the victim, would disappear, for there would be no one in either class. The result, therefore, would be a pure gain: no crime and no punishment. Against this practical conclusion, indeed, Bentham was one of the first to protest; and he uses one very sound argument. Punish all crime equally, he says, and you put a premium on the worst crimes. If both robber and murderer are to be hanged, the robber will have a good reason for destroying evidence, by adding the murder to the plunder of his victims. But, though the argument is very much to the purpose, it seems to make our calculations rather difficult. We cannot look simply to the deterring influence of a given punishment, but have to consider its place in the general tariff, and its influence in inducing people to prefer one variety of crime to another. And if we try to find our way out of this difficulty, we shall have, I think, to find that the mode of reasoning requires some modification.

The theory on which the calculation goes may, perhaps, be represented thus: It is supposed that by hanging a murderer, you prevent, say, ten murders which would otherwise happen. The suffering saved to the ten victims is greater than the actual suffering of the single criminal. Therefore, the infliction of the penalty gives a balance on the side of happiness. The argument seems to me to be sound as far as it

goes, and, in some cases, it would, I think, be sufficient. If, for example, it were proved that the use of a certain remedy, such as inoculation, caused a certain number of deaths, while, on the other hand, it prevented ten times as many, we should consider that a good case had been made out for its adoption. And, similarly, if we attended simply to the number of executions and to the number of crimes, and could make the necessary arithmetical comparison, we should be able to estimate the balance of good or evil in terms of pain and pleasure. But this mode of considering the case is obviously inadequate; and, indeed, Bentham (though I cannot now go into his teaching) feels and makes allowance for its inadequacy. For, to say nothing else, the mere deterrence of a certain number of crimes is an entirely insufficient measure of the effect of the law. The one obvious remark is that, by suppressing violence, you not only save a certain number of lives, but you secure an essential condition of all civilised life. I came here to-night without a revolver in my pocket; and I am not aware that I showed any particular courage by doing so. But it would have been foolhardy to have shown the same negligence, a few years ago, in some of the Western States of America. If I had lived in such conditions, I should not only have taken a revolver, but have, very possibly, thought

---

it a duty to join a vigilance committee, with a view to the suppression of crimes of violence. There are still regions where the fact that a man lives in a neighbouring village is a sufficient justification for shooting him down as soon as he comes in sight, for the simple reason that, otherwise, he would shoot you. So, when private war was still part of the regular custom, there was an obstacle which had to be crushed before any progress could be made in industrial development, which presupposes peaceful intercourse and mutual confidence. The formation of all that is meant by social order, the bringing about of a state of things in which men can meet habitually without fear or precaution, counting with complete confidence upon the absence of any hostile intention, is, obviously, an essential condition of everything that makes life worth living in a civilised country. The fact is too obvious to require much illustration; but it requires notice, for it is very imperfectly recognised when you regard murder, for example, simply as a kind of sporadic disease, which breaks out here and there, and can be kept within limits by killing some murderers, and so frightening other would-be murderers. The criminal law, no doubt, includes that consideration; but it includes infinitely more. It is a necessary corollary of that state of social relations which alone gives a secure



---

base for every conceivable kind of satisfactory social relation. It might, perhaps, serve as a sufficient defence of the old system, when, in the absence of any settled order, the system of private vengeance, of blood-feuds, and so forth, served to restrain the prevalence of actual violence. But it is a totally insufficient measure of the real advantage gained by enforcing order. We have to compare, not only the number of murders and the number of victims which would exist in a given social order, supposing the penalty to be inflicted or not inflicted; but to compare two radically different social states, and to ask, whether it is better to live in a society where peace is the almost invariable rule, and violence the rare exception, or in one in which there is a chaos of little societies, each of them being in constant fear of all its neighbours. The construction of a central authority which will keep the peace is a necessary part of the process of civilisation, and the criminal law is involved in the process. For, of course, it follows that, so long as anti-social elements exist within the borders of society, and some people resort to the old methods of the knife or the bludgeon, they must be put down; and the hangman and the jailer, clumsy as the action may be, represent the only kind of machinery which has hitherto been invented for the purpose.

---

It follows that we must understand "deterrence" in a wider sense than we have hitherto given to it. When we speak of punishment as deterring from crime, we must consider, not merely the effect upon the individual of the prospect of punishment following detection, but the total effect of a systematic adherence to the law upon the preservation of a peaceful state of society at large. We do not simply wish to provide a sufficient motive to decide the individual who is asking himself, shall I steal or not steal? but to maintain an organisation under which property shall be normally respected, and stealing become as exceptional as we can make it. This, in turn, involves much more than a simple execution of the criminal law; it involves the support of agencies for prevention, education, and reformation; though it does, also, involve an inflexible adherence to the criminal law. The law has to use rough means, and cannot possibly affect to adhere precisely to the moral deserts of individual cases. But it is justified by the simple ground that the only alternative is a chaos of barbarism. If you ask, therefore, in what sense is a criminal law just? we must confess that, in certain respects, it is impossible that it should be strictly just; it must deal with the found-out exclusively and with those who are found out in certain definite cases of criminality, and it must, therefore,



impose penalties which do not precisely correspond to the degree of criminality implied. But the relation to morality is, nevertheless, intimate. For the growth of the social order depends upon the growth of the corresponding social instincts; or rather, the two processes are correlative. If I love my neighbour I shall not wish to cut his throat; and, in order that I may love him, I must be pretty sure that he does not mean to cut mine. The external framework provides a protection under which the primary moral instincts can expand; and the expansion of the instincts supposes a correlative modification of the external framework. The moral requirement in regard to the criminal law is, therefore, essentially, that it should be such a law as is favourable, when considered in connection with the whole order, to the strength and development of the existing morality. If the criminal asks, How do you justify yourself for punishing me? the reply must be, Because the inflexible administration of the law is an essential precondition of the whole system, under which alone progress is possible. A society in which peace and order are preserved is superior, in morals as in other respects, to a society in which peace and order are made impossible by violence; and the suppression by punishment of offenders is involved in the system. The advantage of belonging to such a society is not to be measured

---

by counting up the working of individual cases ; but by the whole characteristics of the social state, taken as a whole, and including, as one essential part, the administration of criminal law in such a way as to be in conformity with the conditions of healthy social development. The difficulty, I think, though I can only indicate the argument briefly, results from a common illusion, which is illustrated by the once famous social contract theory. You suppose a number of independent individuals, agreeing to join and expecting to receive a precise equivalent for every sacrifice that they make in consequence. The reply is, that the individual is the product of the society, and it is a mere fiction to consider him as possessing any antecedent rights whatever. His rights are to be deduced from, not to supply the premisses for deducing, the social order. The only considerations which are relevant are those which affect the welfare of the social organism, taken as a whole ; and we must regard them as determined, before we come to the distribution of benefits and burdens among its constituent facts. Otherwise, we should be falling into the same fallacy as if we argued about the health of separate bodily organs, legs, and arms, and stomachs, as though they were independent things, fastened together to make a single machine. Since the leg implies the stomach, any consideration

of the leg's separate rights would be absurd. So the individual member of a political society cannot be regarded as though he had existed outside society somewhere, and was entitled to a precise equivalent for the sacrifice of his independence. The doctrine involves impossible considerations. I have to contribute to certain sanitary regulations, though I may be stronger or weaker than my neighbours, and therefore less or more in need of them. Or, I have to pay a school-rate, whether I have a dozen children or none at all. Do those facts give me a right to complain if I am taxed equally with my neighbours? If so, every benefit which I receive from society must be set down as a separate item in an account to be balanced by itself. Obviously, the advantage which I receive in such cases is the whole advantage received from living in a healthy place or among educated people; and it is essentially impossible to cut that up into a number of different bits of happiness conferred in return for separate payments on account. If I use the contract formula, I must interpret it to mean that amenability to various regulations, including the criminal law, is part of the whole bargain, which would have been made, if it had ever been real, when I decided, if I ever had decided, to join the society. The instinct for punishing criminals guilty of violence is one of the fundamental instincts of

civilisation, and we must accept it just as we accept any other fundamental instinct.

The question of justice, however, is not a whit the less essential because it presupposes this social characteristic instead of supplying the primary axioms from which it is to be deduced. It is undoubtedly of the highest importance that every difference in our method of treating different classes should have its sufficient reason, to be assigned as clearly as possible. The preservation of the peace is essential; but that does not settle the methods by which it is to be preserved.

On what ground, then, are we to deal with the problem of justice as regards different classes of crime? If the calculation of pain and pleasure, as already stated, seems to be unsatisfactory, what is the right principle of proportioning punishment to offence? I have noticed one argument which Bentham applied, and, as I think, with very good reason. To punish crimes equally, he said, is virtually to put a premium upon the worst. The "in for a penny in for a pound" maxim becomes at once applicable. Moreover, as every one now admits, the old brutal system is condemned by experience. To punish a great number of offences with death led to a mixture of excessive brutality with excessive uncertainty. The cruel punishment of some criminals was balanced

by the complete escape of others. But this practical failure clearly resulted, in great measure, from an obscure sense of justice. It was grossly unjust, it seemed, to hang a man for stealing a loaf, when you could only hang another for the brutal murder of his wife. The penalty in the first case, was, it was felt, altogether out of proportion to the offence. This instinctive sentiment was, as I think we all feel, substantially right. In any case, it would have to be taken into account by the legislator, for the obvious reason that punishments which outrun public opinion, tend to make martyrs of criminals. They are either not inflicted, or they set the sympathy of the people on the side of the offender. But to say this, is not to prove the sentiment to be just, only to take account of its existence. And the question, therefore, remains, how it is to be logically justified, for it may seem to imply the theory to which I have objected—the hypothesis of a sort of debtor and creditor account—of the old “eye for an eye” doctrine, which, as I have argued, involves a misconception of the true doctrine. My reply would be, in general terms, that the doctrine requires restatement, and, if properly stated, will not lose but acquire new forces.

Let us consider the consequences of my previous statements. The essential condition of social de-

velopment is enforcement, where necessary, of peace and order by adequate means. The criminal law corresponds to one part of this process. The whole social system includes machinery for prevention, for reformation and for education, as well as for punishment; and it is only when taken in its relation to other parts of the system, that we can give the full justification. Its methods are, as I have said, obviously full of imperfections, from the purely moral point of view. If we consider it as an isolated fact, comparably to the interference of a quasi-supernatural power, which clutches an offender here and there, and punishes him simply to frighten others, the arbitrary and unequal nature of the proceeding assumes an air of injustice. In fact, if you take the extreme individualist view, according to which each man is an independent unit, while society represents a force impinging upon him from without, it always becomes difficult to introduce the conception of justice without ending in the approval of anarchy. When, however, we consider the social organisation as including all the means of civilising society, of strengthening the general spirit of order, as well as acting upon the fears of the disorderly, we have to take wider considerations into account. We become sensible, in the first place, of the importance of the principle that punishment should never be sub-

stituted for prevention. Wherever it is possible to remove temptations, or take precautions which make crime impossible, we can have no excuse for adopting the blundering and unsatisfactory system of punishing those who have committed it. We admit, that is, that the criminal law, though absolutely necessary, is an essentially clumsy contrivance, to be used only when other methods fail. When certain punishments have been condemned as brutalising, it has been replied that the persons punished were already so brutal that it is impossible to make them worse. But the brutalising influence is even more objectionable as it applies to the legislator than as it applies to the criminal. To make up for neglect of appropriate precautions by severity against the offender, is to adopt the necessarily arbitrary method in which chance must always play a part in place of more effective and civilising methods. Frugality in applying punishment is desirable as a guarantee that we are acting in the proper spirit. An Indian official was asked why the native police were disposed to use torture for the detection of crime. The cause was, he said, mainly from laziness: it was so much easier to sit in the shade, rubbing red pepper in a poor devil's eyes, than to go about in a hot sun collecting evidence. So, it would be very much easier to inflict cruel punishment than to try to remove the causes of



---

crime ; and a resolution never to use the more brutal methods is not, as I think, to be regarded as a proof of weak sentimentalism, but as a judicious self-denying ordinance, imposed upon society by itself, as binding it always to adopt, as far as it possibly can, what is at once the more humane and the more scientific method. The same principle involves the careful graduation of punishment. There are, indeed, as I believe, though I cannot give reasons, cases in which crimes ought to be punished with death. There are persons of whom we may say that it would have been better, especially for their neighbours, if they had never been born. "I am worth inconceivably more for hanging than for any other purpose," said the heroic John Brown ; and the words may be applied, in a very different sense, to some of the wretches who occasionally make their appearance in the courts. To hang such a man is to act upon the assumption that murderers represent elements which are entirely and radically anti-social. The only remedy for them is extirpation. But, if this be admitted, it suggests a sufficient reason for not applying it to the cases of less gravity, in which such radical incompatibility has not been demonstrated. Punishment by death, even if necessary, is certainly a confession of impotence. We are admitting that we can do nothing better with the man than convert



him into a scarecrow for the benefit of his like. What more, it may be asked, can we do with a criminal? The obvious reply would be, reform him. Although no one can doubt that reformation would be an extremely good thing, wherever practicable, it may be urged that the enterprise is exceedingly difficult; that, in many cases, it is hopeless; and that we might spend our money and our efforts to better purpose upon more hopeful materials. And yet, I think that the answer is the true one, if properly understood, and will suggest the right meaning to be given to the word "deterrence". So long as we consider the individual case alone, and merely mean that we are giving motives to bad men for refraining from particular lines of conduct, the results, however desirable, are of limited value. But if we consider deterrence as including or coinciding with reformation, as indicating a part of the general system of moral pressure by which the classes exposed to temptation may be gradually raised in the scale of civilisation, we recognise an acceptable meaning. In fact, if we ask what is the deterring influence of punishment, we must observe that at one extreme it will always fail, or only induce a bad man to take precautions against detection; and that, at the other end of the scale, there are a great many cases in which it does not come into active

operation at all. You and I, I hope, are not in the least disposed to assault each other, even though no policeman is present. The bare thought of resorting to violence, pelting me, say, with rotten eggs, has not even suggested itself to you, even though I may be making a very provoking use of my tongue. But there is also an intermediate class of people upon whom the possibility of having to appear in a police court, and the strong sense of shame attached to such appearances, is an active restraining force, tending to limit, and, in cases where the proper conditions exist, gradually to narrow, the sphere of violence. We, the peaceable and law-abiding citizens, have gained a right to those epithets, because we have lived in a sphere where the law has been habitually enforced. We have ceased to carry deadly weapons about us, and have established a general condition of good order. The deterring influence of the criminal law acts, or ought to act, by gradually spreading that state of mind through a steadily widening circle. The classes which are still in need of such a support to their moral instincts are clearly capable of reformation, whatever may be the case of some of the individuals who break the law. A fighting tribe, which has been in the habit of resenting every injury by the use of the knife, may learn, in a very short time, that a court of law settles disputes more agree-

ably than a free fight; and may become a most admirable and efficient part of the society to which it belongs. And the same may be said of large classes in our own society, which are perfectly capable of being converted into good citizens, though they may retain certain propensities developed under a rougher and more brutal system. To employ excessive and brutalising punishments in order to suppress small offences, is, therefore, to abandon the aim of civilising, to declare internecine war against the class, and to regard them simply as a nuisance to be abated. The effect might be, if the law could be carried out, to prevent a certain number of crimes; but it must also be to generate a more dangerous spirit in the class which you regard simply as dangerous, instead of regarding it as the possible raw materials of a more civilised and orderly society. Without attempting to dwell upon a familiar argument, I merely say that this view of the case implies that the governing power should be regarded, not simply as a machinery for catching and killing noxious criminals, but as a great civilising influence, suppressing all temptations to crime, where possible; preferring prevention, in every practicable case, to punishment, and making use of the clumsy, though necessary, weapons in the last resort; and acting by a steady and regulated pressure upon all

anti-social elements. It is only possible to give a satisfactory theory of the jail and the gallows, when you take them as a subordinate part of the system which includes reformatories and schools, and due precautions for the regular preservation of order. The ultimate criterion of justice is not to be found in any attempt to form a debtor and creditor account between the government and the individual; but in the civilising influence of the system, taken as a whole.

And, finally, I come back to the other theory which I have noticed. To supply the defects of the simply deterrent theory, it has been found necessary, as I said, to invoke the vindictive theory. We should go, it was suggested, upon the theory that a criminal is hateful, and, therefore, that it should be a pleasure to punish him. The feelings of resentment and moral indignation are parts of our nature, to which the punishment of the offender affords them a legitimate gratification. Now, to this, I should reply that, in the first place, I do not admit that the desire for revenge, as usually understood, can ever be legitimate. Revenge, as I understand the word, implies a personal feeling. It is taking pleasure in giving pain to a man because he has given pain to me. According to my view of morals, any pleasure in causing pain is, so far, wrong; and the public punish-

ment should be free from all personal motive. I quite agree with Bentham that we ought not to take a positive pleasure in the sufferings, even of the worst criminal; and to admit the legitimacy of such pleasure is to admit an element of pure sentiment to which it is difficult to assign any precise limits. If you allow yourself to hate a man so as to take pleasure in his sufferings, you might justify the infliction of superfluous torture and the old methods of hanging, drawing, and quartering. To do so is precisely to approve the ferocious old treatment, to which, as I conceive, the theory of simple deterrence was an excellent corrective, in so far as it at least implied a definite limit to the indulgence of fiercer passions. There is, however, I think, an element of truth in the doctrine. I admit, that is, that the punishment of a criminal should carry a moral approval, and not be regarded purely as a measure of convenience. Successful crime should be regarded with abhorrence. If a man convicted of a grave offence should be allowed to go without punishment, we should be rightly aggrieved. It is not, however, that we should take pleasure in his suffering, but that we should be pained by an example of the practical impunity of anti-social conduct. The escape of a murderer would, as we should feel, be a blow to the security of all innocent people. In that sense, we

may take pleasure in his punishment, not in the sense of positive enjoyment, but, certainly, in the sense of relief from positive sense of evil. It is, and should be, painful to see the rogues flourish and honest men droop, and to observe "captive good attending captain ill". But the pleasure of seeing the necessary equilibrium restored is different from the pleasure of dwelling upon the sufferings of the disturber. The practical difference is that, while we regard the infliction of suffering as necessary, we admit it to be a necessary evil, and are keenly alive to the inability of keeping it within the limits fixed by the general necessities of the law.

## LUXURY.

PROFESSOR SIDGWICK has been discussing the ethics of luxury, and, according to his wont, has been giving fresh interest to a well-worn topic. I do not wish to dispute anything that he has said, nor do I hope to clear up problems which he professedly left unsolved. In one sense, they obviously cannot be solved precisely. Luxury is a relative term, which cannot be defined in absolute terms. A luxury, in the first place, is distinguished from a necessary. But, then, one man's necessary may be another man's luxury. My very existence depends upon conditions with which another man can dispense. If, again, we admit that there are many things which, though not absolutely necessary, may rightly be used, if they can be used without injuring others, we see that we must also take into account the varying social conditions. If we use luxury, in what Bentham called the dyslogistic sense, we must distinguish between necessities and superfluities, and then divide superfluities into comforts which may be rightfully enjoyed, and luxuries which cannot be enjoyed without in-



curing some degree of moral censure. But the dividing lines are always shifting. Scott tells somewhere of a Highlander sleeping on the open moor in a winter night. When he tried to roll the snow into a pillow his companion kicked it away, as a proof of disgraceful effeminacy. Most of us would come to a speedy end if we lived in a social state where such a standard of hardiness was rigidly enforced. We admit that some kind of pillow may be permitted, if not as absolutely necessary, as, at least, a pardonable comfort. We shall probably agree, also, that nobody is to be blamed for using clean sheets and securing a certain amount of warmth and softness—as much, at least, as is desirable for sanitary reasons. But if we endeavour to prescribe precisely how much may be allowed in excess of the necessary, how often we are to send our sheets to the wash, whether it is right to have lace upon our pillows, and so forth, we get into problems where any attempt at precision is obviously illusory. We are the more perplexed by the question, whether the provision of a bed for ourselves causes other people to go without a bed, and, perhaps, without supper, or how far we are bound to take such consequences into account. Without aiming, therefore, at an impossible precision, I shall try to consider—not what objects should be called luxuries, or comforts, or necessities, but what are the

really relevant considerations by which we should endeavour to guide our judgments.

Luxury is, as I have said, a well-worn topic. Saints and philosophers in all ages, have denounced the excessive love of material enjoyments, and set examples of a more or less thorough-going asceticism. It was—to go no further back—one of the favourite topics of our ancestors, in such papers as the *Spectator* and the *Rambler*. Addison, in his *Cato*, described the simple Numidian, whose standard appears to have resembled that of Scott's Highlander. The Numidian, he says, rests his head upon a rock at night, and, if next day he chances to find a new repast or an untasted spring, "blesses his stars and calls it luxury". General Oglethorpe quoted this passage, in an argument about luxury, to Johnson, and added, "let us have *that* kind of luxury, sir, if you will". Johnson himself put down all this declamation as part of the cant from which we ought to clear our minds. No nation, he said to Goldsmith, was ever hurt by luxury. "Let us take a walk from Charing Cross to Whitechapel, through the greatest series of shops in the world: what is there in any of these shops (if you except gin-shops) that can do any human being any harm?" "I accept your challenge," said Goldsmith. "The next shop to Northumberland House is a pickle-shop." To which the excellent Johnson

replied, first, that five pickle-shops could serve the whole kingdom ; secondly, that no harm was done to anybody either by making pickles or by eating pickles. I will not go into the ethics of pickles. I only quote this to remind you that this was one of the stock questions of the period ; and not without reason. The denunciation of luxury was, in fact, the mark of a very significant tendency. Goldsmith had expressed the prevalent sentiment in the *Deserted Village*, as in the familiar passage beginning :—

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates and men decay.

And Goldsmith, like many contemporaries, was only versifying the sentiments uttered most powerfully by Rousseau in his famous exaltation of the ideal man of nature above the man of a corrupt civilisation. The theory has some affinity to the ancient doctrine already expounded by classical writers, according to which each form of government includes a principle of decay as well as of life. One stage in the process of corruption of Plato's ideal republic is marked by the appearance of the drones, people who take a surfeit of unnecessary pleasures, and, to obtain satisfaction, associate themselves with the fierce and rapacious. In Rousseau's time, this view became connected with the growing belief in progress and

“perfectibility”. It was a symptom of warning to the drones of his day. It showed that the thoughtful classes were becoming dimly sensible that something was wrong in the social organisation; and that a selfish and indolent aristocracy should be called upon to put its house in order. The denunciation of luxury meant, in short, that the rich and powerful were accused of indulgence in pleasures which they had not earned by services, but by the rigid enforcement of class privileges. Considered from this point of view, as the muttering of a coming storm, as the expression of a vague foreboding that the world was somehow out of joint, we may see more meaning than appears at first sight, in the old-fashioned commonplaces of our great-grandfathers. The language has changed its form; but the discontent at the misuse of wealth in various forms has certainly not diminished since that time.

Obviously, then, the question of luxury is connected with very wide and deep problems as to what is the proper use of wealth, and might lead us into ultimate questions as to the justification of the right to private property at all. I shall try, however, to keep as closely as may be to the particular aspect of such problems, which is immediately relevant to this particular question. And for this purpose, I think it will be convenient to take two points separately.

The objections to luxury may be stated either with reference to the individual or with reference to the society. That is to say, that if we consider a man by himself, we may ask with Johnson, whether expenditure upon pickles is injurious to the constitution, or at what point it becomes injurious. And, in the next place, we may ask whether, if we see our way to decide that pickles are wholesome as well as agreeable, some of us may not be getting more than our fair share of pickles, and so diminishing the total sum of pleasure, by inordinate consumption. First, then, I discard, for the moment, all social considerations. I take for granted, for the sake of argument, that my indulgence does no harm to any one else ; that I am not depriving others of a means of enjoyment, but simply adding to my own ; or, at any rate, that I am not, for the moment, to take into account that set of consequences. How far, on this hypothesis, or, say, setting aside all question of duty to my neighbour, should I be prudent in accumulating wealth ? I sometimes amuse myself with the problem, How rich should I like to be, supposing that I were perfectly wise in that sense in which wisdom is compatible with thorough-going egoism, or with what is called enlightened self-interest ? The obvious answer is that, in that case, there would be no limits to my desires. An imaginative American, we are told, de-

finer competence as "a million a minute and all your expenses paid". The suggestion is fascinating, but not, to my mind, quite satisfactory. It recalls a doctrine which used to be put forward by the old political economists. They had to meet the theory—a preposterous theory enough—of the danger of a universal glut; the danger, that is, that a nation might produce so much that nothing would have any value, and, therefore, that we should all be ruined by all becoming enormously rich. To meet this, it was often urged—along with more satisfactory arguments—that human desires were illimitable; and, therefore, that however rich a man might become he would always wish to become a little richer.

According to this doctrine, the desire for wealth cannot be satiated. The millionaire would still choose an extra half-crown rather than refuse it, although the half-crown brings him incomparably less additional pleasure than it brought him when his pockets were empty. But it is also true that long before we were millionaires, the pleasure obtainable by additional wealth may be infinitesimal, or absolutely non-existent. The simple desires may be easily saturated. Pope asks, "What riches give us, let us then inquire". And he replies, "Meat, fire, and clothes—what more? Meat, clothes, and fire." This is, in fact, a pithy summary of our most element-

ary and necessary wants. Now, our demand for meat is obviously strictly limited. As soon as we have eaten, say, a pound of beefsteak, we do not want more; by the time we have eaten, say, three pounds we do not only not want more, we loathe the very thought of eating. So, when we are clothed sufficiently for comfort and decency, more clothing is simply a burden; and we wish only for so much fire as will keep our thermometer within certain limits; a heat above or below would mean death either by burning or by freezing. Our ultimate aim, therefore, in regard to desires of this class, is not to increase the stimulus indefinitely, but to preserve a certain balance or equilibrium. If we want more food after our appetites are satisfied, it must either be with a view to our future consumption, which is still strictly finite, or else with a view to exchanging the food for something else, in which case it is desired, not as food, but as the means of satisfying some other desire. If, then, Pope's doctrine were really sound, which actually amounts to saying, if our desires were really limited to the physical conditions necessary to life, we should very soon reach the state in which they would be completely glutted or saturated. It may be worth while to note the circumstance which rather obscures our recognition of this fact. We may distinguish be-



tween the wealth which a man actually uses and that which remains, as I may say, only potential. A man may desire an indefinite quantity of wealth, because he may wish to have rights which he may yet never turn to actual account. There is a certain satisfaction, no doubt, in knowing that I have a vast balance at my banker's, though I have no desire to use it. I may want it some time or other; and, even if I never want it, I may enjoy the sense of having a disproportionate barrier of money-bags piled up between me and the yawning gulf of actual poverty. Therefore, though a very limited amount may be enough to satiate all our existing desires, we may like to know that there is more at our disposal. If possession carried with it the necessity of using our property, if we could not have potential as distinguished from actual wealth, we should be so far from desiring an indefinite increase of wealth that we should regard the increase beyond a certain limit as only one of two intolerable alternatives.

The question, therefore, How rich should I wish to be? requires an answer to the previous question, How rich can I be? A man, even if on the intellectual level of a savage, can be indefinitely rich in potential wealth: he may, that is, have a right to millions of pounds or be the owner of thousands of acres; but in order to use them he must have certain

capacities and sensibilities. It is a curious question, for example, how much of the wealth of a country would cease to be wealth at all if the intelligence of the possessors were lowered certain degrees in the scale? A large part of the wealth of England consists, I suppose, of machinery. If nobody knew more of machines than I do—and my whole notion of a machine is that it is something that goes round somehow if you happen to turn the right handle—all this wealth would become as useless as an electric telegraph in the possession of a hairy Ainu. And if nobody had any better artistic perception than mine, and we were therefore unable to see the difference between a Raphael and the daub in an advertising placard, the pictures in the National Gallery would have an average value, say, of eighteen-pence. A man, therefore, who is at the lower levels of intelligence is simply unable to be actually rich, beyond a narrow limit. The fact is occasionally forced upon us by striking examples. I heard the other day a story—I am afraid we all hear such stories too often—of a man who had become enormously rich by a freak of fortune. His only idea of enjoyment happened to be gin. He could, therefore, only use his wealth by drinking himself to death; a proceeding which he accordingly felt to be only a proper tribute to his improved social position. A similar

result happens whenever a sudden rise of wages to an insufficiently civilised class leads to the enrichment of publicans, instead of increased indulgence in refined and innocent pleasures. The man, in short, whose idea of pleasure is simply the gratification of the physical appetites in their coarser forms is incapable of becoming actually rich, because a small amount of wealth will enable him to saturate his desires by providing a superfluity of the material means of gratification. It is, perhaps, here that we may take into account the remark so often made by moralists, by Adam Smith among others, as Professor Sidgwick reminds us, that happiness is more evenly distributed among different classes than we suppose. The king, according to Shakespeare, cannot—

With all the tide of pomp  
That beats upon the high shore of this world . . .  
Sleep so soundly as the wretched slave  
Who with a body filled and vacant mind  
Gets him to rest, cramm'd with distressful bread.

The “body filled” and the “vacant mind” make up for the “distressful bread”. It is as well, that is, to have no wants except the want of mere physical comfort, as to have higher wants and the means of gratifying them, and yet to be saddled with the anxieties and responsibilities which the higher position involves. The doctrine, “I am not really better

off than you," is, indeed, not a very graceful one from those who are actually better off. There was some excuse for the fox who said the grapes were sour when he could not get them; it argued a judicious desire to make the best of things: but if he made the remark while he was comfortably chewing them, by way of pacifying the grapeless foxes, we should have thought him a more objectionable hypocrite. The pauper may fairly reply, "If you really mean that your wealth brings no happiness, why don't you change places with me?" I will, therefore, not defend the statement, considered as an exhortation to content; but I accept it as a recognition of the obvious fact, that if happiness means a satisfaction of all our desires, a man of small means may be as happy as the man of the greatest means, if his desires are limited in proportion. But is it for our happiness to increase them?

Does our principle hold when we suppose a man to have the necessary sensibilities for the actual enjoyment of wealth? If he acquires the tastes which imply greater intellectual cultivation, a power, therefore, of taking into account sources of pleasure more complex and more distant in time and space, does it then become true that his power of using wealth will be indefinite? I should reply, in the first place, that we must still admit the same psychological

truth. Any desire whatever, that is, is capable of yielding only a strictly finite amount of enjoyment; the pleasure which we can derive from it must be limited both by the necessity of gratifying other desires and by the fact that no desire whatever is capable of an indefinite increase by increased stimulation. After a certain point of excitement is reached, we cannot get more pleasure by any accumulation of internal conditions. We assume for the present that our aim is simply to extract the greatest possible amount of gratification out of life. We must then take for our data our actual constitution, capacities, sensibilities, and so forth, and calculate how much wealth could be actually applied in order to keep us moving always along the line of maximum enjoyment. This would be to study the art of life on purely hedonistic principles. We should ask, what career will on the whole be fullest of enjoyment? and then, what material conditions can enable us to follow that career? I imagine that the amount requisite would vary indefinitely according to our characters. Suppose, for example, that a man has strong intellectual tastes, a love of art or science or literature. He will require, of course, enough wealth to enable him to devote himself without anxiety to his favourite pursuits, and enough, moreover, to train himself in all requisite knowledge. But granting

this, the material conditions of happiness will be sufficiently fulfilled. I think it was Agassiz who observed when he was devoting himself to science that he had not time to get rich. Wealth to him would have been rather an impediment than an advantage. A man like Faraday, who placed his whole happiness in the extension of scientific knowledge, and who was not less honoured because he lived upon a modest income, would not have had a greater amount of that kind of happiness had he possessed the wealth of a Rothschild. A man whose pleasure is in reading books, or contemplating works of art, or listening to music, can obtain the highest enjoyment at a very moderate price, and could get very little more if he had the most unbounded wealth at his disposal. If we inquired what men possessing such tastes had derived from them the greatest happiness, we should, I fancy, find ourselves mentioning men comparatively poor, whose enjoyments were even comparatively keen, because they had to devote a certain amount of care and contrivance to obtaining full play for their capacities. Charles Lamb, plotting and contriving to get an old volume from a bookstall, possibly got more pleasure from his taste than if he had been the possessor of a gigantic library. The sociable man, again, the man whose pleasure in society is the genuine delight in a real interchange of

thought and sympathy, who does not desire magnificent entertainment, but the stimulus of intimate association with congenial friends, would probably find the highest pleasure in comparatively simple social strata, where the display of wealth was no object, and men met, as Johnson met his friends at the club, to put mind fairly to mind, and to stimulate intellectual activity, instead of consuming the maximum of luxury. Milton's sonnet to Lawrence gives perhaps a rather severe but a very fascinating ideal of refined luxury :—

What neat repast shall feast us, light and choice,  
Of Attic taste with wine, whence we may rise  
To hear the lute well touched, or artful voice  
Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air ?  
He who of these delights can judge, and spare  
To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

Nor need we be accused of inordinate boasting if we should say that we would rather have made a third at such a feast than have joined a dozen rowdy courtiers at the table of Charles II.

There are, however, pleasures which undoubtedly suppose an indefinite capacity for using wealth. There is, for example, such a thing as the pure love of splendour, which is represented so curiously in some of Disraeli's novels. One of his heroes, if I remember rightly, proposed to follow the precedent actually set by Beckford, who built at Fonthill a



tower 300 feet high—not because it was wanted for any other purpose, but simply for the sake of building a tower. Of course, if one has a taste for towers 300 feet high, there is no particular limit to the quantity of wealth which may be found convenient. One of the gentlest and most delicate satirists of modern society, Mr. Du Maurier, has given us admirable illustrations of a more vulgar form of the same tendency in his portraits of Sir Gorgius Midas. When that worthy denounces his servants because there are only three footmen sitting up till two o'clock to save him the trouble of using a latch-key, we may admit that his pleasures, such as they were, were capable of finding gratification in any quantity of expenditure. It might be a question, indeed, if we had time to ask it, whether the pleasure derived from such expenses by the millionaire be really so great as the pleasure which he had when he first turned the proverbial half-crown, with which he must have come to London, into his first five shillings; and it is certainly also a question whether his expenditure was ethically right. But at present we are only considering facts, and we may admit that there would be no filling such a gulf of desire by any dribble of bullion; and, further, that there are pleasures—not, on the face of them, immoral—in procuring which any quantity of money may be spent. If a man is

simply desirous of obtaining influence, or, in some cases, political power; or if he decides to muddle away his money upon charity, there are no limits to the sums he may spend, especially if he has no objection to corrupting his neighbours.

Before saying anything upon this, however, I must pause to deduce a conclusion. Keeping still to the purely hedonistic point of view, I ask, At what point does expenditure become luxurious in a culpable sense? meaning by "culpable" not morally culpable, but simply injudicious from the point of view of enlightened self-interest. To this I think that one answer is already suggested, that is to say, that since, on the one hand, a certain finite quantity of wealth will enable us to keep to the happiest or most philosophic career; and since, on the other hand, a man may possess a quantity of superfluous wealth which he can only use on penalty of deviating from that career, he becomes foolish, if not immoral—upon which I say nothing—when he tries to use more. That people frequently commit this folly is undeniable. Wealth ought to be (I mean would be by a judiciously selfish person) regarded as a means of enjoyment. Therefore the superfluous wealth should be left in the potential stage—as a balance at his banker's or accumulating in the funds. But though the possession does not imply a necessity of

using, it does generally imply a sort of tacit feeling of responsibility—responsibility, that is, to a man's self. I have got so much money; surely it is a duty to myself to use it for my pleasure. So far as a man yields to such an argument, he becomes the slave instead of the master of his wealth. What ought to be machinery for furthering an end, becomes an end in itself: and, at that point of conduct, I think that we are disposed to call a man's life luxurious in a distinctly bad sense. The error, as I have suggested, is perhaps at bottom much the same as that which leads a poor man to spend an increase of wages at a gin-shop. But we do not call the gin-drinker luxurious, but simply vicious. For luxury seems to apply less to conduct which we can distinctly call bad in itself, than to conduct which only becomes bad or foolish as implying a disproportion between the end attained and the expense of attaining it. It applies when a man has, as we say, so much money that he does not know what to do with it. We speak of luxuries in the case of Sir Gorgius, where the prominent fact is that the man has been gorged with excessive wealth, and is yet too dull to use it in any manner which would increase the happiness of a reasonable or refined being. So it is generally regarded as characteristic rather of the upstart or newly-made millionaire than of the man born to higher

position, whose life is perhaps as selfish and hardly superior morally. But the nobleman by birth has inherited a certain art of life ; he has acquired traditional modes of arranging his pleasures, which give him the appearance, at least, of possessing more judicious and refined tastes ; and we are less shocked than by the man who has obviously wealth which he knows not how to use, and which he, therefore, deliberately devotes to coarse and vulgar ostentation. The upstart may not be more selfish at bottom ; but he dashes in your face the evidence of his selfishness, and appeals for admiration on the simple ground that he has a larger income than his neighbours. Luxury means, on this showing, all such expenditure as is objectionable, not because the pleasure obtained is intrinsically bad, but because we are spending for the sake of spending, and could get more real enjoyment at a lower sum. I need not dwell upon the fact that men of moderate means may fall into the same error. The fault of exaggerating the importance of machinery is not confined to those whom we call rich. Thackeray's discourses upon Snobs are full expositions of the same weakness in the middle classes. When we read, for example, of Colonel Ponto being miserable because he tries to make an income of a thousand a year support the pomp accessible to persons with ten thousand, we see that he has as false a view as

Sir Gorgius of the true ends of life. And I refer to the same great satirist for abundant illustrations of the weaknesses which too often make society a machinery for wasting money on display, and entirely oblivious that it should be a machinery for the promotion of intellectual and refined pleasures.

Now, if I have given a fair account of luxury as considered simply from the point of view of an enlightened selfishness, I may proceed to the ethical question. So far, I have only asked, in substance, at what point our expenditure upon pickles becomes foolish. But, of course, the more important question arises, at what point it becomes selfish. A man may be silly for spending money upon erecting towers; but if he does no harm to his neighbours we hardly call him wicked. We cannot say that it is unconditionally wrong to build a tower. We must inquire, therefore, how far luxury necessarily involves a wrong to others. Here we must begin by listening to all the philosophers and divines of whom I spoke at starting. Any number of wise and good men will tell us, in various dialects, that pleasure is in itself bad, or, at least, that all the pleasures obtainable by wealth are bad, or, at any rate, beneath the notice of the higher spirits. There are the thorough-going ascetics, who strive, not to regulate, but to suppress all except the absolutely necessary physical instincts, and think

that even those desires savour of evil ; who consider the best man to be the man who lives upon bread and water, and, if possible, upon mouldy bread and ditch-water. There are, again, spiritually-minded people, who consider all happiness to be worthless, except such happiness as results from aspirations to another world ; who regard all riches as chains binding the soul to earth ; who take the words “ Blessed are the poor ” in the most literal sense, as defining the true aim of life. We should seek, they say, for happiness elsewhere than in this transitory stage of existence, remember that the world is a mere screen hiding the awful realities of heaven and hell ; and despise even such pleasures as are generally called intellectual pleasures, the pleasures, for example, of art or science, for they, too, belong really to the sphere of illusion, and are simply more subtle temptations than those of the flesh. And, besides these, we have the philosophers, who would have us live in the world of pure intellect, and tell us that the true moral of life is to make ourselves independent of external circumstances by suppressing all the corresponding desires. Renunciation, therefore, is the first lesson to be learned by the wise man ; and the practical rule, as has been said, is that we should endeavour not to increase our numerator but to lessen our denominator. I cannot now discuss such doctrines. I am content

to say that I regard them not as simply false, but as distorted views of truth. For my part, I am content to say that, even as a moralist, I wish to see people as happy as possible; that being, after all, a poor utilitarian after my own fashion, I desire—however erroneously—the greatest happiness of the greatest number; and, in particular, that I should like to see, not a feebler, but a much keener appreciation of all the pleasures derivable from art, or science, or literature, or rational society, even, if I may say so, from good cookery and athletic sports. Briefly, the ideal society seems to me to be one in which even our lower instincts should not be suppressed, but regulated; and the typical man of the future to be one whose whole faculties and their corresponding sensibilities should be cultivated to the utmost possible degree. What is the application of this to our special question? I do not know that I can do better than refer to the writings of Bernard Mandeville, who in his *Fable of the Bees*—one of the cleverest books in the language—succeeded by the help of much paradox, and under a cloak of cynicism, in stating the problem with singular vivacity. Private vices, that was his way of putting it, are public benefits. His meaning, put less paradoxically, was this: accept, on the one hand, the ascetic doctrine that pursuit of pleasure is intrinsically vicious, and you condemn all the impulses



by which the structure of society, especially the industrial structure, has been built up. Accept, on the other hand, the doctrine that civilisation is, on the whole, a good thing, and you admit that the instincts, which, upon this hypothesis, correspond to private vices, are the only means of producing a public benefit. In other words, if we took the language of theologians in its natural sense, and really regarded the world as worthless, we should have no industry, no trade or commerce, and be still living in swamps and forests, digging up roots with our nails, living upon acorns and shell-fish, and scarcely even painting ourselves blue, for to the savage blue paint was a luxury. Now, apart from any question as to the fairness of this version of theological doctrine, we may ask, What is the real underlying difficulty—or that aspect of it which is still worth considering? We may grant, in the first place, to Mandeville, that, in point of fact, the construction of a civilised society presupposes the development of numerous desires, many of which are more or less condemned by severe moralists. If the savage comes to value blue paint, he may take to planting something to exchange for it, instead of simply lying on his back to digest his last handful of acorns; and, in so doing, he makes the first step towards the development of an industrial system. The

desire for wealth is, of course, implied in all stages of progress if men are to create wealth; and we can partly answer Mandeville's paradox by throwing over the ascetic and declaring that a desire for good meat, and fire, and clothes, even for pictures, and books, and music, or for such comforts as most of us enjoy, is not in itself immoral; and that, on the contrary, the more there is of such enjoyment the better for men's bodies and minds, and therefore, on the whole, the better for their morality. But the moral difficulty returns in a new shape. The desire for wealth, let us say, is not in itself bad; it is simply natural—it is a desire for one essential condition of a tolerably happy life. But is it not bad, in so far as it is selfish? Do not the desires which have been the mainspring of all modern development imply a desire of each man to get rich at the expense of others? Have they not been the source of all that division between rich and poor which makes one side luxurious and the other miserable? Has not Dives become rich and bloated by force of the very same process which has made Lazarus a mass of sores and misery? Suppress the desire for wealth, and we should still be savages "running wild in woods". But was not even the noble savage better than the pauper who now hangs on to the fringes of society? and is his existence compensated by the existence of other

classes who have more wealth than they can use? And so the old problem comes back; and we have, as of old, the most contradictory answers to the problem.

I am, I confess it, one of those old-fashioned people who believe in progress, and hold that their own century is distinctly better than any which preceded it; who would on no account go back, if they could, to the days of the noble savages or even to the brutalities and superstitions of the ages of faith. But I do not think that I need argue that question for our present purpose. We have got to this century somehow, and we can only get out of it by living till the twentieth. Meanwhile, we should make the best of the interval. I will, therefore, only permit myself one remark. If we suppose, with Mandeville, that the instincts which have developed modern society have been, to a great extent, selfish desires, that is, for the personal comfort of the agent, irrespectively of consequences to others, it does not follow that the corresponding development has been mischievous. Good commonplace moralists have been much in the habit of condemning the selfish passions of kings and conquerors. What can be an easier mark for denunciation than such a man, for example, as Louis XI. of France, and the wily and cruel rulers of past ages, whose only aim was to enlarge their own powers

and wealth? And yet, if we consider the matter historically, we must admit that such men have rendered enormous services to mankind. A ruler, let us say, had for his only object the extension and concentration of his own authority. Still, it was by the conflicts of rulers that the great nations have been formed out of a chaos of struggling clans; that peace and order, therefore, have been substituted for violence, throughout broad territories; that law has taken the place of private war; moreover, that the privileges of selfish orders have been suppressed through the development of a larger and more civilised national organisation; and that, although the immediate victory was won by the selfish ruler, the ultimate benefit has accrued to the people upon whom he was forced to rely for support against the oppressive subordinate powers. The ruler, perhaps, did not look beyond his own interests; but his own interest forced him to find allies among the mass of the population, and so gradually led to the formation of central organs, representing not the personal interest of the king, but the interest of the whole nation in which they had arisen. We may make a similar remark upon industrial development. The great merchant and capitalist and inventor of new methods and machinery has not looked, it may be, beyond his own interest; but, intentionally or not,

---

he was helping to construct a vast organisation, which, whether it has, on the whole, improved the world or not, has, at least, made it enormously richer. Perhaps Watt, when he was improving the steam-engine, thought only of the profits to be derived from his invention. But the profit which he gained after a laborious life was but an infinitesimal fraction of the enormous increase of efficiency which resulted to the national industry. We cannot doubt that the whole gigantic system which at least maintains a population several times multiplied, which maintains part of it in wealth and a large proportion in reasonable comfort, has been due to the labours of many men, each working for his own interest and animated chiefly by the desire of wealth. So much remains true of the economist's doctrine of the natural harmony between individual and public interest. In this case, as in the case of governments, we may, perhaps, say that men acted from motives which must be called selfish, in this sense at least, that they thought of little but their own interests; but that, at the same time, their own interests compelled them to work in a direction which promoted, more or less, the interests of others. I add, briefly, that these are only instances of what we may call the general rule: namely, that morality begins from an external or unrecognised conformity of interests, and

ends by recognising and adopting, as motives, the consequences which, in the earlier stage, seemed to be internal or accidental consequences. I begin by helping a man because circumstances make it useful to myself, and I end—and only become truly moral when I end—by doing what is useful to him, because it is useful to him. When, indeed, I have reached that point, my end itself is profoundly modified; it becomes much wider, and yet only regulates and directs to new channels a great deal of the corresponding conduct.

The consideration of this modification—of the change which should take place when a man not only pursues such conduct as is beneficial on the whole to a country, but pursues it with a view to the beneficial consequences—brings us back to the question of luxury. The bare pursuit of wealth as the end of existence implies, of course, indifference to the means by which it is produced; an equal readiness, for example, to grow rich by cheating my neighbour, or by actually producing a greater quantity of useful produce. It is consistent with a simple desire to enlarge my business without reference to the effect upon the persons I employ, as when manufacturers enriched themselves by cruel exploitation of the labour of infants. But if we hope for a state of things in which an employer should consider himself

as essentially part of the national organism, as increasing his own wealth only by such means as would be also advantageous to the comfort of the nation generally, the pursuit of wealth would become moralised.

Here, in fact, we must once more consider Mandeville's paradox. Desire for wealth, he substantially says, must be good because it stimulates industry. When your lazy barbarian, who has no pleasure but gorging himself with food, comes also to desire fine clothes, he is not only a degree more refined in his tastes, but his increased industry leads him to produce enough food to support his tailor, and provision is made for two men instead of one. But desire for wealth, it is replied, is bad, because it leads our barbarian not only to consume the product of his own labour, but to consume that of somebody else. Mandeville gained piquancy for his argument by confusing the two cases. Since the desire is good, all its manifestations must be good. Extravagance, for example, is good, and, as he put it, the fire of London was a benefit to industry because it set up a greater demand for the services of carpenters and bricklayers. I need not say how frequently an argument substantially the same has been adopted by good writers, and simple extravagance been praised because it was supposed to be "good for trade".



Political economists have been forced to labour the point that extravagant consumption does not increase wealth; but the only curious thing is that such a point should ever have required demonstration. The conclusion, which is sufficient for our purpose, is simply that an absolute denunciation or an absolute exaltation of the desire for wealth is equally impossible; for the desire may have contrary effects. In one shape it may stimulate to enjoyments which actually diminish wealth in general, or, at any rate, to those which lead to the actual exploitation of the many for the benefit of the few; and, on the other hand, to denounce it, simply would be to denounce all the springs of action which raise men above the barbarous state of society. When we look at the contrasts between the rich and the poor, we must rightfully desire a greater equality of distribution; but we may be tempted to approve too easily any means which may lead to such equality. It is, indeed, obvious that if all the national resources which are now applied to producing superfluities could be turned to the production of necessities, we could support the same population in a greater comfort, or support a much greater population at a point just above starvation level. But it does not at all follow that a society in which every man's labour was devoted entirely to the task of providing neces-

saries would in fact be either more comfortable or more numerous. Historically speaking, the fact is the very reverse. The only societies in which there is such an equality are societies in which the level is one of uniform misery, and whose total industrial efficiency is incomparably smaller than that of the more civilised races. It has been only in so far as a nation has been able to support classes with sufficient means to devote themselves to science and art, and the cultivation of the higher faculties generally, that it has acquired the vast powers of production which enable some to be disproportionately rich, but which also enable numerous masses to support themselves in tolerable comfort where there were once a few wandering barbarians. That the more cultivated classes have sought only their own advantage instead of the general benefit, may be too true; but the conclusion is, not that they should cease to have the desires which entitle a man to be called a civilised being, but that these desires should be so regulated and moralised as to subserve directly and necessarily the ends which they have only promoted indirectly and accidentally. A society which has grown rich by mechanical discoveries and industrious organisation has acquired the power of greatly raising the average level of comfort. If, in point of fact, its power has been greatly misused, if a great development of

poverty has taken place side by side with a great development of industrial efficiency, the proper inference is not that we should denounce the desires from which the efficiency is derived, but that we should direct them into such channels as may lead to the more universal distribution of the advantages which they create.

It is, I think, from this point of view that we can best judge of the moral objection to luxury. For, as I previously suggested, luxury begins when a man becomes the slave instead of the master of his wealth; when that which ought to be a mere machinery becomes an end in itself; and when, therefore, there is a tendency to cultivate and stimulate to excess those lower passions which, though necessary within limits, may beyond those limits distort and lower the whole character, and make the pursuit of worthy objects impossible. We know that the king who had the reputation of being the wisest of mankind, after building a splendid temple and a gorgeous palace, and filling them with vessels of gold, and importing ivory and apes and peacocks, could find nothing better to do with the rest than to take 700 wives and 300 concubines—a measure which hardly increased his domestic felicity, but no doubt got rid of a good deal of money. Although few men have Solomon's opportunities of affording a

typical instance of luxury, many of us show ourselves capable of weakness similar at least in kind. I need not multiply examples. The great mystery of fashion is perhaps a trifling but a significant example. When people, instead of considering dress as a means of displaying the beauty of the human frame, consider their bodies as mere pegs upon which to display clothes, and are ready to distort their own forms to fill arbitrary shapes, changed at short intervals to increase the cost, they are clearly exemplifying the confusion between means and ends. When a young gentleman spends a fortune upon the turf, or upon gambling, he shows that he has no more conception than the poor boy who plays pitch-and-toss with halfpence of the ways in which wealth might be made conducive to undertakings worthy of absorbing human energy. When, on pretence of cultivating society, we invent a whole cumbrous social apparatus which makes all rational conversation impossible, we know that the display of wealth has become an end to which we are ready to sacrifice our ostensible purpose. Now, I suggest that such luxury, such exaltation of the machinery above the ultimate good, corresponds pretty nearly to the distinction between the desires which lead to the rightful use and those which lead to the shameful misuse of wealth in a social sense. Human nature,

indeed, is singularly complex, and it is impossible to deny that the hope of acquiring such luxuries may incidentally lead to that increase of industry and development of national resources which, as we have seen, is the ground upon which it is defended. The industrious apprentice may have been stimulated to become Lord Mayor by the odours from his master's turtle-soup; Arkwright, perhaps, was induced to invent the machinery which revolutionised the cotton manufactures by the hope of becoming Sir Richard, and rivalling the coarse luxury of some stupid Squire Western. But we cannot doubt that upon a large scale the love of the grosser indulgences is bad, even from its purely economical point of view. If, incidentally, it encourages industry, it far more directly and necessarily encourages wasteful expenditure. If a rich man can only spend his thousands at a gambling-table, the poorer man cannot be blamed for gambling with a thimble-rigger. When Solomon set up his domestic establishment, every shopkeeper in Jerusalem might be encouraged to marry an extra wife. If a rich man, who has enough to saturate a healthy appetite, tries how much money he can spend, like the old classical epicures, upon new dishes of nightingales' tongues, you can hardly expect the poorer man to refrain from an extra glass of gin. Briefly, so far as the resources

of a nation are spent upon the mere ostentation—which we call vulgar, to imply that it is spending for the sake of expense, foolishly trying to get more pleasure for an appetite already gorged to excess, by simply increasing the stimulus—it is encouraging all the forces which make rather for waste than increased productiveness, and justifying the natural jealousy of the poorer. So far, that is, as a desire for wealth means a desire to consume as much as possible on supersaturating the lower appetites, the commonest argument against private property in general is not only plausible but justified. I should say, then, that luxury in a bad sense begins wherever in expenditure it indicates an insufficient sense of the responsibility which attaches to all wealth. This does not condemn an expenditure which may seem, from some points of view, luxurious; though, as I have said, I cannot profess to draw any distinct line in what is essentially a question of degree and of actual possibilities. I can only suggest in general that a man is *primâ facie* justified in all such expenditure as tends to the highest possible cultivation of his faculties and of the faculties of those dependent upon him. I hold it to be a matter of the highest importance that there should be a thoroughly civilised class—a class capable of all intellectual pleasures; loving the beauties of art and nature; studying every possible

---

department of knowledge, scientific and historical; maintaining all such modes of recreation and social enjoyment as are naturally appropriate to such a class. And I do not call any man luxurious for maintaining his position in such a sphere, or for enabling his children to follow in his steps. I believe that, as things are, the existence of such a class is a necessary condition of national welfare and of the preservation and extension of the whole body of cultivation which we have received from our ancestors. What is requisite is, that the class should be not only capable of refined enjoyment, but of discharging its functions relatively to the nation at large, and spreading a higher standard of enjoyment through the whole community. So far as the richer class maintains certain traditions, moral and intellectual—traditions of personal honour and public spirit, of artistic and literary cultivation—it may be discharging an invaluable function, and its existence may be a necessary means of diffusing a higher civilisation through the masses who have not the same advantage. Whatever employments of wealth contribute to make a man more efficient as an individual member of society, to strengthen his understanding and his perceptions, to widen his intellectual horizon and interest his sympathies, and the enjoyments which correspond to them, are not to



be condemned as luxurious. They are, at present, only within the reach of the richer classes, ardently as we may hope that the power of partaking them may be extended as rapidly and widely as possible. But the growth of luxury, in the bad sense, is the indication that the class which should act as the brain of the social organism is ceasing to discharge its functions, and becoming what we call a survival. It is a kind of moral gout—an aristocratic disease, showing that the secretions are becoming disordered for want of a proper application of the energies. It was in that sense, as I said before, that our grandfathers denounced the luxury which proved that the ruling classes, especially in France, had retained their privileges while abandoning the corresponding duties. If in England we escaped so violent a catastrophe, it was because, with all their luxuries and levities and shortsightedness, the aristocratic classes were still playing an active part, and, if not governing well, doing whatever was done in the way of governing. But every class, and every member of a class, should always remember that he may be asked whether, on the whole, he and his like can give any sufficient reason for his or their existence, and that he ought to be prepared with a satisfactory answer. When he has to admit that his indulgences are in the main what may be called luxuries in the

bad sense, he may consider that he is receiving notice to quit.

This may suggest the last remark that I need make. It is impossible, I have said, to say definitely this is, and that is not, a luxury : and, in general, that is not the way in which the question presents itself. We have rather to decide upon our general standard of life, and to adopt a certain scale of living more or less fixed for us by our social surroundings. We can all do something towards rationalising the habitual modes of expenditure, and adapting the machinery to such ends as are worthy of intelligent and cultivated beings. So far as inclination is in the direction of vulgarity, of ostentatious habits, of multiplying idle ceremonies and cumbrous pomposities, we can protest by our own conduct, at least, in favour of plain living and high thinking. But so far as social life is really adapted to the advancement of intellect, the humanising and refinement of our sympathies, it promotes an improvement which cannot but spread beyond the immediate circle. Even such pursuits, it is true, may incidentally become provocative of an objectionable luxury. A man who is a lover of art, for example, occasionally shuts himself out all the more from the average sympathies, and indulges in pleasures, less gross but, perhaps, even more enervating than some which we should call distinctly sensual.

The art, whether literary or plastic, which is only appreciable by the connoisseur, is an art which is luxurious because it is on the way to corruption. Nothing is clearer in the vague set of guesses which pass for æsthetic theory, than this : that to be healthy and vigorous, art must spread beyond cliques and studios, and express the strongest instincts and emotions of the society in which it is developed. This, I think, is significant of a general principle. Luxury is characteristic of a class with narrow outlook, and devoted to such enjoyments as are, by their nature, incapable of communication. Whenever the enjoyments are such as have an intrinsic tendency to raise the general standard, as well as to heighten the pleasure of a few, they cannot be simply stigmatised as luxurious. The old view of the responsibilities of wealth was chiefly confined to the doctrine that the rich man should give away as many of his superfluities as possible, to be scrambled for by the poor, in order to appease the Fates. We have come to see that charity, though at present a necessary, should be regarded as a degrading necessity ; and, therefore, not in the long run a possible alternative to luxury. Too often it is itself a kind of luxury as mischievous as selfish disregard to the natural consequences of our expenditure. The true direction of our wishes should rather be to direct social energies into such channels

as have a natural affinity to public spirit. A man who really loves art because he has a keen sense of beauty, not because he wishes to have the reputation of a skilful collector, would surely try to beautify the world in which we all live, to get rid of the hideous deformities which meet us at every turn, and not simply to make a little corner into which he may retire for simple self-indulgence. A lover of truth should not be content, as some philosophers were forced to be content, with discussion in an esoteric circle, but should endeavour, now that thought is free, to stimulate the intellectual activity of all men, confident that the greater the number of investigators, the more rapid will be the advance of truth. I do not venture to suggest what special direction should be taken by those who have the privileges and responsibilities of great wealth. I have never had to consider that problem in any practical reference. Still, considering how vast a part they actually play in social development, how great is their influence, and how many people and enterprises seem to be in want of a little money, I cannot help fancying that a rich man may find modes of expenditure other than reckless charity or elaborate pampering of his personal wants, which would be not only more useful to the world, but more interesting to himself than many of the ordinary forms of indulgence. But I am

only speaking of general tendencies, and have disavowed any capacity for laying down precise regulations. If I have stated rightly what is the evil properly attacked when we speak of luxury as vicious, it will, I think, come mainly to this: that the direction in which we should look for improvement is not so much in directly prescribing any Spartan or ascetic system of life, as in cultivating in every one who possesses superfluities, the sense of his implicit responsibility to his fellows, which should go with every increase of wealth, and the conviction, not that he should regard pleasure as in itself bad, but that he should train himself to find pleasures in such conduct as makes him a more efficient member of the body corporate of Society. If, indeed, there should be any man who feels that he has no right to superfluities at all, while so many are wanting necessities, and should resolve to devote himself to the improvement of their elevation, I should say, in the first place, I fully and heartily recognise him to be one of the very large class which I regard as my superiors in morality; although, in the next place, I should insinuate that he is one of those heroes who, while they deserve all honour, cannot be taken as models for universal imitation, inasmuch as I cannot help thinking that the ultimate end is not the renunciation but the multiplication of all innocent happiness.



## THE DUTIES OF AUTHORS.

I PROPOSE to speak to you to-day upon a subject which, though I may perhaps be tempted to exaggerate its importance, possesses some real importance. I have undertaken to speak upon the duties of the class to which I belong. I make, however, no claims to the position of censor. I have no such claim, except, indeed, the claim of possessing some experience. There are two ways, I may observe, in which a man may acquire a sense of the importance of any moral law. One is by keeping the law, and the other is by breaking it. In some ways, perhaps, the systematic offender has acquired the most valuable experience. No one can speak more feelingly about the evils of intemperance than the reformed drunkard, unless it be the drunkard who has not reformed. The sober gentleman who has never exceeded can realise neither the force of the temptation nor the severity of the penalty. On the other hand, I must admit that some writers upon ethical questions have been men of fair moral character. I only make the statement by way of



explaining that, in speaking of the duties of authors, I do not assert, even by the most indirect implication, that I personally have either observed or disregarded the principles which I shall discuss. Whether I am a model for imitation or an example of the evils to be avoided, matters nothing to this discourse; though the question to which of these classes I belong has a certain interest for myself.

There is one other matter which I can deal with very briefly. I have said that the subject has a certain importance. Upon that it is needless to dilate; for, in the first place, authors have been engaged for generations, and never more industriously than in this generation, in preaching the vast importance of authors to mankind. I could not hope to add anything to their eloquence upon a topic with which they are so familiar. We may, however, assume that the enormous mass of literature which is daily produced, whether its abundance be a matter of regret or exultation, is at least a proof that a vast number of people read something, and are, we may suppose, more or less affected by what they read. It cannot be indifferent to inquire what are the duties of those who undertake to provide for this ever-growing demand.

One matter has been lately discussed which may serve as a starting-point for what I have to say. A

French author who came the other day to observe our manners and customs, was impressed by the fact that so much of our writing is anonymous. The public, that is, reads without knowing who are its instructors, and the instructors write without incurring any definite personal responsibility. The problem is naturally suggested, whether such a system be not morally objectionable. Ought not a man who undertakes to speak as an authority let us know who he is, and therefore with what authority he speaks? The question could hardly be answered satisfactorily without some study of the facts; and especially of the way in which the system has grown up. I can only notice one or two obvious reflections. A century ago we boasted—and we had reason to boast—that the English Press was the freest in Europe. It was already a very important factor in political life. But at that period the profession of letters was still regarded as more or less disreputable. The great author—the poet, divine, or historian—was indeed fully as much respected as he is now; but to write for money or to write in periodicals was held to be not quite worthy of a gentleman. Byron, for example, refused to take money for his poetry, and taunted others for taking money, until so much money was offered to him that he swallowed his scruples. Burns, though as much in need of money,

had shortly before refused to write for money ; and Wordsworth held that his high calling imposed upon him the duty of rather repelling than seeking the popularity by which money is to be won. We have changed all this, and the greatest modern authors are less apt to disavow a desire for pay, than to complain that their pay is insufficient. The employment—it can hardly be called the profession—of periodical writing, again—the only kind of writing which could make literature a source of a regular income—was long regarded as a kind of poor relation of the respectable or so-called learned professions, clerical, legal, and medical. Jeffrey, whose fame now rests upon his position as the editor of *The Edinburgh Review*, was for a long time anxious to conceal his employment as not exactly creditable. In the year 1809 the benchers of Lincoln's Inn passed a resolution that no one should be called to the Bar who had written for money in a newspaper. Writers in newspapers since that time have frequently risen to the Bench, and have been not the least honoured of Cabinet Ministers. Yet the sentiment which involved a certain stigma has only disappeared in this generation. And the historical cause seems to be obvious. The newspaper Press had gradually grown up in spite of authority. It had first been persecuted, and writers had escaped persecution by consenting to be spies or

dependants upon great men. Half the hack-authors aspired to subsidies from the secret-service money, and the other half were looking for a reward when their patrons should have a turn in the distribution of good things. The Press was freer than elsewhere, for the English system of government gave importance to public discussion. Both Ministers and Opposition wished to influence voters through the papers. But the authors were in the position of dependent auxiliaries, prosecuted for libel if they went too far, and recompensed by pensions for the risks they had to run; they were despised, even by those who used them, as a set of mercenary guerillas, employed to do dirty work and insinuate charges which could not be made by responsible people, and ready, as was supposed, to serve on whichever side would pay them best. According to a well-known anecdote, two writers of the eighteenth century decided by the toss of a halfpenny which should write for Walpole and which should write for his adversary Pulteney; but the choice was generally decided by less reputable motives. Now, so long as the Press meant such a class it was of course natural that the trade should be regarded as discreditable, and should be carried on by men who had less care for their character than for their pockets. In England, where our development has been continuous and traditions linger long,

the sentiment long survived; and the practice which corresponded to it—the practice, that is, of anonymity—has itself survived the sentiment which gave it birth.

I do not, indeed, mean to insinuate that the practice may not have better reasons than that which led to its first adoption. The mask was formerly worn by men who were ashamed of their employment, and who had the same reasons for anonymity as a thief or an anarchist may have for a disguise. It may now be worn even by men who are proud of their profession, because the mask has a different significance. When a journalist calls himself “we” instead of “I,” the word really represents a fact: the fact that he speaks not simply as an individual, but as the mouthpiece of a corporation, which itself claims to be the organ of a party. The plural covers whatever additional weight may be due to this representative character. To consider the value of this justification would take me too far. I have spoken of this historical fact because I think that it illustrates a more general problem.

For, in the first place, I think that there were some elements in the older sentiment which deserved respect. When an author was as anxious to disavow the charge of writing for money as an author at the present day is to claim his reward, I cannot, for my

part, simply set him down as silly. "My songs," said Burns, "are either above price or below price, and, therefore, I will accept nothing." I respect his feelings. He may not have been quite logical; but he was surely right in the belief that the poet whose inspiration should come from his breeches-pocket would never write true songs or embody the very spirit of a nation. I do not doubt that authors ought to be paid; but I certainly agree that a money reward never ought to be the chief aim of their writing. And I confess that some utterances about copyrights in these days have jarred upon me, because they seem to imply that the doctrine is not disavowed so unequivocally as it should be by our leaders. I am, indeed, happy to believe, as I fully believe, that there has never been a time at which more good work has been done for pure love of the work, independently, and even in defiance, of pecuniary considerations. But I cannot help thinking that in their desire to establish a right to the profits of their work, authors have condescended at moments to speak as if that reward constituted their sole motive to work, instead of being desired—as it may most properly be desired—simply as the means of enabling them to work. The old contempt was aristocratic, and in these days we have come to use aristocratic as a term of abuse. My own impression

is that we ought to be just even to aristocrats ; and in that contempt for all such work, I think that there was a genuine element of self-respect. The noble despised the poor scribe who had to get his living by his pen. We, my lords, as Chesterfield put it, may thank Providence that we do not depend upon our brains. It is wrong, no doubt, to despise anybody ; and especially mean to despise a man for poverty. But the sentiment also included the belief—surely not so wrong—that the adventurer who joined the ranks of a party for the sake of the pay was so far contemptible, and likely to join the party which paid best. The misfortune, no doubt, was that the political state involved such dependence ; and the desirable solution that every one should become independent. Till that solution was more or less reached, the corresponding sentiment was inevitable, and not without meaning.

Well, the literary class has had its declaration of independence. An author has long ceased to need a patron, and he is in little danger of the law of libel. The question occurs : What are the qualities by which we should justify our independence ? Have we not still a certain stoop of the shoulders, a kind of traditional shamefacedness, an awkwardness of manner, and a tendency to blush and stammer, which shows that we are not quite at ease in our new



position? Or have we not—it is a more serious question—exchanged dependence upon the great for dependence upon the public, rather than learnt to stand upon our own feet? Have we made ourselves, and, if we have not, how can we make ourselves, worthy of our position as free men? We boast that the Press does part of what used to be done by the priesthood, that we enlighten and encourage and purify public opinion. There is a whole class which depends upon us for intellectual culture; which reads nothing that is not in newspapers and magazines. Do we give them a wholesome training, provide them with sound knowledge, and stimulate them to real thought? Are we such a priesthood as is really raising the standard of human life; or such a priesthood as is clinging to power by echoing the superstitions of its congregations? Nature is ruled by obeying her; and what is called ruling public opinion is too often servilely following its dictates. There is an old story which tells how a certain newspaper used to send out an emissary to discover what was the common remark that every one was making in omnibuses and club smoking-rooms, and to fashion it into next morning's article for the instruction of mankind. The echo affected to set the tune which it really repeated. Now, there is nothing more flattering than an echo. “This must be an inspired

teacher, for he says exactly what I thought myself," is a very common and effective argument. To reproduce the opinions of the average reader; to dress them so skilfully that he will be pleased to see what keen intelligence is implied in holding such opinions; to say just what everybody wishes to have said a little more neatly than everybody could say it, or, at the outside, to say to-day what every one will be saying to-morrow, is one path to success in journalism. There is, I am afraid, much so-called education which tends to nothing better than a development of this art. I was consulted the other day by a young gentleman who was proposing to put himself under a professor of journalism. So far as I could gather from his account, the professor did not suggest that the pupil should study any branch of serious knowledge: that he should become, for example, a good political economist, or read ancient or modern history, or make himself familiar with continental affairs or bimetallism, or other thorny and complex subjects. The aim was precisely to enable him to dispense with all study, and to spin words out of absolute mental vacuity. If such an art can really be acquired, it is scarcely an art to be recommended to ingenuous youth. And yet, as I understand, it is an art which is more or less countenanced even at our universities. A distinguished classman learns

much, but the last thing he learns is the depth of his own ignorance. He is too often practised in the power of beating out his gold or his tinsel to cover the largest possible surface ; he becomes an adept in adopting the very last new fashion of thought ; he can pronounce dogmatically upon all previous thinkers after reading not their own works, but the summary given in the last text-book. Success in the art of passing examinations requires the same qualities which enable a man to write off-hand a brilliant leading article upon any side of any subject. I have often heard remarks upon the modern diffusion of literary skill. Ten people, it is said, can write well now for one who could write well fifty years ago. No doubt the demand for facile writing has enormously increased the supply. But I do not think that first-rate writing—the writing which speaks of a full mind and strong convictions, which is clear because it is thorough, not because it is shallow—has increased in the same proportion, if, indeed, we can be sure that it has increased at all. Perhaps there are ten times as many people who can put other men's thoughts into fluent phrases ; but are there ten times as many, are there even as many, who think for themselves and speak at first hand ? The practice of anonymous writing affords, of course, obvious conveniences to a superficial omniscience. The young gentleman who

dogmatises so early might blush if he had to sign his name to his audacious utterances. His tone of infallibility would be absurd if we knew who was the pope that was promulgating dogmas. The man in a mask professes to detect at a glance the absurd sophistries which impose upon the keenest contemporary intellects ; but if he doffed the mask and appeared as young Mr. Smith, or Jones, who took his degree last year, we might doubt whether he had a right to assume so calmly that the sophistry is all on the other side. I am, however, quite aware that this is only one side of the question of anonymity. Were the practice abolished, the journalist who was forced to appear in his own character might abandon not his superficiality, but whatever power of blushing he retains. The more fluent phrase-monger might take himself even more seriously than he now does, and might persuade other people to take him seriously too. The charlatan, in short, might have a better chance, and use his notoriety as a stepping-stone to more mischievous ambition.

I refrain from discussing this question : the rather because it is obvious that such changes must work themselves out gradually, and that we may assume, for the present, that the position will not be materially changed. I am, therefore, content to infer that the journalist should at least bear in mind one obvious

criterion. He should never say anything anonymously to which he would be ashamed to sign his name. I do not mean merely that he should not be libellous or spiteful—I hope and believe that the underhand assassin of reputations, who at one period was common enough, has almost ceased to exist,—but rather that he should refrain from that pompous assumption of omniscience which would be ludicrous in a simple individual. He should say nothing when he speaks in the plural which would make him look silly if he used the first person singular. Now, this modest requirement involves, I think, a good deal. I will try to say what it involves by an example, of which I frequently think. I remember a young gentleman, who, in my hearing, confessed, in answer to a question from Carlyle, that he did a certain amount of journalistic work. The great man thereupon said, with his usual candour, and, I must add, without any personal discourtesy, that, in his opinion, the journalism of the period was just so much ditch-water. What should be a well of English undefiled poured forth streams little better than a public sewer. The phrase, like some other prophetic utterances, sounded a trifle harsh, but was all the more calculated to set me thinking. My thinking naturally led me to reflect upon Carlyle's own example. I was invited some time afterwards to sign a little testimonial

presented to him upon his eightieth birthday, in imitation of the gift which he had himself forwarded to Goethe. In this it was said, and said, I think, most truly, that Carlyle was himself an example of the heroic life in literature. And why? A good many epigrams have been levelled at Carlyle, and he has more than once been ridiculed as the philosopher who preached the virtues of silence in thirty volumes. Now, Carlyle's utterances about silence may not have been unimpeachable ; but I think that, stated in a commonplace way, they substantially come to this : that idle talk, a mere spinning of phrases, is a very demoralising habit, and one great mischief of the present day ; but that the serious and careful utterance of real thought and genuine knowledge must be considered rather as a mode of action than of talk, and deserves the cordial welcome of all men. A Goethe affects action as much as a Napoleon. Carlyle did not really mean to draw the line between an active and a literary life ; for he knew as well as any man that literature may at once require the most strenuous activity, and be the source of life and vigour in active men ; but between frivolity and earnestness, between the mere waste and dissipation of energy and its concentration upon some worthy purpose. Judged by such a standard, Carlyle's words were also deeds. He wrote a good deal, for he lived a long time, and

had for many years to live by his pen. I could, I think, mention several professional authors who habitually provide as much copy in a month as Carlyle ever achieved in a year. But, luckily for them, their works are not collected. Carlyle appears to be voluminous because he never wrote anything which was not worth preservation, and that because he never wrote an essay without making it as good as his abilities permitted. He did so, although he was till middle life hard pressed for money, and helping to support his family out of his narrow earnings. He stuck indomitably to his own ideal of what was best, though he had slowly to form a public which could appreciate him. And through long years of struggle and hardship he never condescended to make easy gains at the price of inferior workmanship, or to lower his standard of excellence in order to meet the immediate demands of editors. In that sense, if in no other, I call Carlyle a worthy hero of literature, and I reverence his example a great deal more, I fear, than I have imitated it.

Perhaps, indeed, a man must have an unusually, even unreasonably, strong conviction of the truth and importance of his mission before he can make such sacrifices in order to discharge it worthily. To most of us the question occurs whether it can possibly be worth while to do so. Perhaps, if I devoted my-



self exclusively to delivering my message to mankind as forcibly as I could, and to making all necessary preparations, it might be rather more effective than the second-hand twaddle which I actually produce. But would the game be worth the candle? I have, it may be, a family to support. Should I not, as an honest man, think first of my butcher and my baker and of paying the collector of rates, before I undertake to become an immortal author? Probably, at the best, my immortality would be a very short one, for there is not one author in a thousand who can make his voice audible at the distance of a generation. Is it not better and wiser to earn an honest living by innocent small talk, than to aim at a great success and let my children go barefoot and lose their schooling? That low man, says Browning's Grammarian—

That low man goes on adding one to one,  
His hundred's soon hit :  
This high man, aiming at a million,  
Misses an unit.

Is it not better to hit your hundred than to aim at your million and miss it? That is a problem which I do not think it possible to answer by a general rule. We rightly honour the Carlyle or the Wordsworth who has forced the public to admire him in spite of critical gibes and long obscurity ; but we must not

forget that even success does not necessarily justify the audacity which has won it, and that a good many people who fancied themselves to be capable of enlightening the world have been empty-headed impostors who would have done better to take the critic's advice: drop their pens and mind their gallipots. Devotion to an ideal, like other high qualities, may be misplaced or counterfeited by mere personal vanity. But leaving each man to decide by the concrete circumstances of his own case, I still hold that at least we should try in this respect to act in Carlyle's spirit. I cannot blame the author who, under certain conditions, feels that his first duty is to pay his weekly bills, so long, of course, as he does not earn the money by pandering to the bad passions of his readers; for there are modes of making a livelihood by the pen to which starvation or the workhouse would be preferred by any high-minded man. But we will not judge harshly of the author who lives by supplying innocent, if rather insipid, food for public amusement. He might be capable of better things; but, then, he might certainly be doing much worse. Yet in any case, I say that, to have a tolerably comfortable conscience, an author should try to look a little farther than this. The great mass of mankind has to devote most of its energies to employments which require nothing more

than honest work ; and yet even the humblest can do something to maintain and elevate the moral standard of his surroundings. The author, so far as he is simply a journeyman, a reporter of ordinary events and speeches, for example, does his duty so far as he reports them honestly ; and we have no more to say to him. But the author who takes part in political and social or religious discussions has a responsibility which involves something more. Probably he feels—I am sure enough that I feel—that his performance makes remarkably little difference to mankind in general ; and that he is playing only an infinitesimal part in the great processes by which the huge world blunders along, struggling into some approximation to a more tolerable order. He may compare himself to one of the myriads of insects building up one square yard on the coral reef which stretches for hundreds of leagues. Yet even the coral reef depends on the units, and if the insect's powers are small it concerns him to make the best of them. Now, to make the best of them implies some genuine interest in his work ; something that makes the reader perceive that he is being addressed by a human being, not a mere machine for vamping up old materials. I have been struck in reading newspaper articles, even my own, by the curious loss of individuality which a man seems to suffer as a writer.

Unconsciously the author takes the colour of his organ ; he adopts not only its sentiment but its style, and seems to become a mere transmitter of messages, with whose substance he has no more to do than the wires of the electric telegraph which carries them. But now and then we suddenly come across something fresh and original ; we know by instinct that we are being addressed by another man, and are in a living relation to a separate human being, not to a mere drilled characterless unit of a disciplined army ; we find actually thoughts, convictions, arguments, which, though all arguments are old, have evidently struck the writer's mind, and not merely been transmitted into his pen ; and then we may know that we are in the presence of a real force, and meeting with a man who is doing his duty. I refrain from mentioning, though I easily could mention, living modern instances. But on looking to the history of the past, it is curious to notice how rare the phenomenon is, and how important it is when it occurs. Think for a moment, for example, of old Cobbett, agricultural labourer and soldier, with nothing to help him but his shrewd mother-wit and his burly English strength. He wrote much that was poor and clumsy enough ; much, too, that was pure claptrap, and much that was dictated by personal motives and desire for notoriety. But in spite of this the untaught

peasant became one of the great political forces, more effective than the ninety and nine elegant *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* reviewers, who had all the advantages which he lacked. Why? Partly, no doubt, because he was a really strong man; but also because he had at least one genuine and deeply-rooted conviction, springing out of his profound desire for the welfare of the class which was both the largest and the most helpless of the England of his day. He is, therefore, one example, and there are many others, of the singular power which is exercised in journalism by a man, under whatever disadvantages, who possesses, or rather who is possessed by, some master-thought, and utters it in season and out of season with perhaps disproportionate intensity, but with perfect sincerity. Now, though Cobbett would be in some respects a bad model, I only refer to him in this sense. When my young friends consult me as to the conditions of successful journalism, my first bit of advice comes to this: know something really; at any rate, try to know something; be the slaves of some genuine idea, or you will be the slaves of a newspaper—a bit of mechanism instead of a man. You can carry on the business with self-respect—whatever your success—if it is also something more than a business; if, for example, you can honestly feel that you are helping on the propa-

ganda of sound principle, denouncing real grievances, and speaking from genuine belief. No man has a right to lay down the law to statesmen as though he were in possession of absolute knowledge, or as though he were a man of science talking to a class of ignorant schoolboys. But every man ought to believe that truth is attainable, and to endeavour with all his power to attain it. He should study the great problems of the day historically: for he must know how they have arisen; what previous attempts have been made to solve them; how far recent suggestions are mere reproductions of exploded fallacies; and so qualify himself to see things in their true relations as facts of a great process of evolution. He should endeavour to be philosophical in spirit, so far, at least, as to seek to base his opinions upon general principles, and to look at the events of the day from a higher point of view than that of personal or party expediency. And he must, though upon this it is hardly necessary to insist, be familiar with the affairs of the day: for no one can apply principles to politics effectively without a genuine first-hand knowledge of the actual currents of political life. Unless a man can take up his calling in some such spirit, he can be but a mere retailer of popular commonplaces, and must live from hand to mouth or upon the chance utterances of people as thoughtless

as himself, increasing the volume of mere noise which threatens to drown sense. But if he seriously cultivates his powers, and enriches his mind, he may feel sure that even in journalism he may be discharging one of the most important functions which a man can undertake. He may be right or wrong in the particular doctrines which he supports. Indeed, the first and most obvious result of any attempt to take wider views of politics is the admission that wisdom (and as certainly, nonsense) is not the exclusive possession of any party in politics, literature, or philosophy. But something is done whenever a man of trained intellect and genuine conviction lifts popular discussion to a higher plane. At such times it rises above the region of personal invective or pure platitude, and involves a conscious reference to great principles and to the remote conditions of the little bit of history which we are actually transacting. When John Stuart Mill became a member of the House of Commons, and was accepted as a philosopher coming among practical men, he said much that displeased his hearers; but it was observed by competent judges at the time, that the tone of parliamentary debates was perceptibly raised. Members of Parliament were forced to reflect for the moment, not only how their speeches would tell in next day's reports, and what traps they were setting for op-



ponents, but also for a brief instant, how their arguments would stand the test of impartial logic. Mill tells a significant story in his autobiography, which, perhaps, indicates one source of his influence. When he appeared upon the hustings he was asked whether he had not said that the English working-classes were generally liars. He replied simply, "I did," and the reply was, he says, received with "vehement applause". The incident, he adds, convinced him that the working-classes valued nothing more than thorough straightforwardness, and honoured a man for daring to tell them of their faults. I hope that it is so: I believe, in point of fact, that no quality is more heartily honoured than unflinching political honesty. And I confess that I have often wondered why it is that where the reward is so clear, so few people take the plain road which leads to it. It seems equally clear that moral courage pays better than any other quality in politics, and that it is the rarest of all qualities even to be simulated. We are all anxious to show how profound is our affection for the masses; but how many candidates for their favour dare to give Mr. Mill's proof of genuine respect? No doubt you must make it clear that you possess some other qualities before you can hope to conciliate the respect of a class by accusing it openly of habitual lying. Indeed, this might be taken as a

test of genuine independence. Till you can tell men of their faults without being suspected of spite or bad temper—till you can praise them without being suspected of unworthy flattery—you are not really in a position worthy to be called independent. How many journalists—I say nothing of statesmen—stand firmly enough on their own legs to speak out without giving offence? We are often told of a great revolution of opinion, and especially of the abandonment of the old prejudice against government interference. That a great change has taken place in the opinions which men profess is undeniable; though how far that change has been due to unbiassed scientific reflection, and how far to a change in the conditions of popularity, is a very different question. I see, for example, a statement by an honourable gentleman that he approves of the Eight Hours Bill because the principle of non-interference with adult labour is obsolete. It is too late to avow it. If the honourable gentleman means to say that experience has proved the principle to be erroneous, he is, of course, justified in abandoning it. But, if his meaning be simply that the principle has gone out of fashion, what is this but to admit that you will abandon any doctrine as soon as it ceases to be popular? Do we really mean to assert that a fallacious doctrine can never get the upper hand;

that the beliefs of to-day are always better than the beliefs of yesterday; that every man who has dared to stick to an opinion condemned by a majority must necessarily be a fool for his pains? That really seems to be a common opinion. We hear a great deal at the present day about "mandates," and a mandate seems to be regarded not simply as a declaration of the will of a majority which must, in point of fact, be obeyed, but as the official utterance of an infallible church which cannot in point of logic be erroneous. Now, I confess that I have always had a weakness for the faithful Abdiel. I believe that a man is often doing invaluable services who resists the dominant current of opinion, who denounces fallacies when they are growing and flourishing, and points out that a revolution in belief, even though it be inevitable for the time, and even though it contain an element of right reason, may yet contain errors and hasty judgments and deviations from the true line of progress, which require exposure the more unsparing in proportion to their temporary popularity. Is not the ordinary journalist's frame of mind singularly unfavourable to his discharge of this function? and is it not inevitable that it should be so as long as the journalist's only aim is to gain a hearing somehow? It matters not which side he takes. He denounces some new doctrine, but only in

the name of the current prejudices which it happens to shock. He advocates it, but only because it is the last new fashion of the day. In either case he falls into the ordinary party vice of imagining that his opponents must be fools or knaves, that their opinions are directly inspired by the devil or a judicial blindness inflicted by Providence, simply because he will not take the trouble to understand them. The man who would try to raise himself above the position of the mere pander to passing antipathies must widen his intellectual horizon. He must qualify himself to take broad views ; he must learn that his little list of commonplaces does not represent real thought, but is often the embodiment of mere prejudice, or perhaps the deposit of words left by thinkers of past generations ; he must learn to do more than merely dish them up with a new sauce ; he must concentrate his abilities upon definite problems, consider how they have arisen, and what is their relation to the past and the future. To do so requires some disinterestedness : some love of truth for its own sake ; and a capacity for answering your opponent by explaining him, instead of a mere quickness for taunting him personally. It requires, no doubt, serious and prolonged application. Even such a training will not enable a man to unlock all the puzzles of the day ; but it may help towards the

desirable consummation in which a solution is at least sought in connection with established principles, and with a constant reference to the organised experience which also can be a safe guide to more reasonable conclusions. Even the attempt to do so may strengthen a man against the temptation to take short cuts to notoriety, and seek a momentary sensation at the sacrifice of permanent effect. We owe gratitude to all who have acted upon such principles and won the influence which comes at last, though it comes slowly, to honest work, bestowed even upon such shifting materials as political and moral philosophy.

I have dwelt so far chiefly upon political journalism, because it is so characteristic a part of modern literature, and illustrates so clearly some obvious tendencies of the time. I must say something, however, of another department of literature, which is sometimes said to have nothing at all to do with morality. The poet or the novelist, it is suggested, has no duties except that duty which Scheherazade discharged at the risk of her neck,—the duty of keeping her master amused. If, instead of telling him stories about genii, she had read him every morning an orthodox sermon or an ethical discourse, the one thousand and one nights would have been diminished by one thousand. Am I to tell our modern Schehe-

razades to forget the *Arabian Nights*, and adopt for our use passages from the homilies of Tillotson? Some religious persons have taken that horn of the dilemma, and perhaps with some plausibility. When the world is heaving with the throes of a social earthquake, what right have you or I to be lounging on sofas, telling silly stories about young ladies' and gentlemen's billings and cooings? Perhaps the condemnation should be extended to recreations less obviously frivolous. Your philosopher who tries to distinguish or to identify "is" and "is not," and to draw the true line between object and subject, has a very fascinating plaything, but is perhaps as far from influencing the world. Judging from the history of past philosophical cobwebs, he might as well be framing conundrums, or learning how to throw grain through the eye of a needle.

I only refer to this to say that I am not in favour of suppressing either art or philosophy. I have a kind of hankering after them in some forms myself. I assume, without further argument, that Shakespeare, and Milton, and Wordsworth, and Fielding, and Scott, and Dickens, did well in devoting themselves to literature, and probably did more to make the world happier and better than if they had composed sermons or systems of philosophy. I must, as I said, refrain from pronouncing any set eulogy upon

the services rendered by authors. This only I take for granted. No one, I think, of any intellectual capacity can remember the early days when his faculties were ripening, when he wandered, for the pure delight of wandering, in the enchanted world of the great imaginative writers, saw through their eyes, and unconsciously caught the contagion of their sympathies, without feeling a deep gratitude to the men who not only gave him so much innocent pleasure, but who incidentally refined his taste and roused his enthusiasm, and quickened his perception of whatever is beautiful, or heroic, or pathetic, in the moral or the natural world. The highest literature embodies the instincts by which a cultivated people differs from the barbarous, and the classes are in a true sense civilised, which enjoy and appreciate the ennobling as distinguished from the coarser pleasures, and rise above the merely brutal life. One who aspires to be a leader, or to follow the steps of the leaders, in this band of crusaders against barbarism, must surely have some corresponding duties. I am here upon the edge of certain troublesome controversies which I shall refrain from discussing at length. This only I need say. Some great authors explicitly accept the function of preaching. Milton, and, in later days, Wordsworth, identified the offices of the prophet and the poet, and set themselves



deliberately to expound an ideal of life, and justify the ways of God to man. And Milton gave the principle in his famous saying, that he who would write well hereafter of laudable things must be himself a true poem. Yet men equally great have impressed readers by their apparent indifference to such considerations. They accept the new commandment which, as Emerson tells us, the Muse gave to her darling son, "Thou shalt not preach". Shakespeare and Scott did not consciously and deliberately write to set forth any ideal; they even wrote, more or less, to make money; they were magnificent opulent geniuses, who poured out their imaginative wealth liberally and spontaneously, without a thought of any particular moral, simply because their minds were full to overflowing of great thoughts and vivid images, which they diffused as liberally as the rose gives its scent. Are we to say that they were wrong or morally inferior, even if artistically superior, to those who wrote, like Milton or Dante, with a more definite aim? Must I condemn Scott because he did not write, like the excellent Miss Edgeworth, or even like Dickens in some of his stories, to preach consciously that honesty is the best policy, or that selfishness is a vice; and, if so, must I not condemn a man from whom I have not only received an incalculable amount of innocent enjoyment, but

imbibed—it is my own fault if I have not imbibed—many thoughts that have strengthened and stimulated the best elements of my nature? If I insist upon the moral influences, am I not confounding the poet and the preacher, and falling under the lash of I know not how many critical connoisseurs? If I renounce the preachers, I am renouncing some of the greatest artists, and indirectly sanctioning even such art as is worthy only of Holywell Street, and panders to the worst passions.

I will say what I think. Great writers, it seems to me, may be great in two ways; and the greatest is he who combines them most thoroughly. The first-rate writer, in the first place, must—to use a frequently misapplied word—be a thorough realist. He is great in proportion to the width and depth of the truths which he grasps, and to which he gives the most perfect expression. When we read Shakespeare at his best, what strikes us is that he has expressed once for all some home-truth about human nature and the world, round which all inferior writers seem to have been blundering without ever achieving a complete utterance. More generally, every great period of our literature has been marked in one shape or other by a fresh realism, or what is called the desire to return to Nature: to get rid of the phrases which have become conventional and

unreal, and express the real living ultimate truth. Shakespeare and the great men of his time were inspired by such a passion ; they were animated by the desire to "hold the mirror up to Nature" and to portray real vivid human passion, for they had burst through the old mediæval chains of theological dogma, and were aroused to a sudden fresh perception of the beauties which had been unrecognised and misconceived by ascetic monks. The men of Pope's time, again, believed in what they, too, called the "religion of Nature," and tried to hasten the day when enlightened reason should finally crush what Berkeley called the "pedantry of courts and schools". Wordsworth and his followers inaugurated a new era by proposing a return to "Nature," because the language, which with Pope expressed a real meaning, had again become the conventional language of a narrow class of critics and the town. It is in all ages one great function of the imaginative writers to get rid of mere survivals ; to forego the spectacles used by their ancestors as helps, which have now become encumbrances ; to destroy the formulas employed only to save the trouble of thinking, and make us see facts directly, instead of being befooled by words. In that sense it is their great service that they break up the old frost of dreary commonplace, and give life and power, in

place of an acceptance of mere ossified or fossilised remnants of what once was thought. Briefly, they teach us to see what is before us. So far the function of the poet resembles that of the scientific and philosophic observer. He differs radically in method, because he proceeds by intuition instead of analysis; shows us the type, instead of cataloguing the attributes of a class; and gives us a real living man—a Falstaff or a Hamlet—instead of propounding a psychological theory as to the relations of the will, the intellect, and the emotions.

I take it, therefore, that realism in this sense is one essential characteristic of great imaginative power. I hold it to be more than ever necessary; more necessary because scientific methods of thought are more developed. It is less possible for a serious writer to make use of the merely fanciful symbols which were perfectly legitimate as long as they represented real beliefs, but are now fitter for only the lighter moods. The greatest writers have to dispense with fairies and fighting gods and goddesses, and the muses, and to show us a direct portraiture of the forces by which society is actually moved. But the functions of the great writer, though they involve a perception of truth, are not adequately defined by the simple condition of truthfulness. He has to be—may I say it?—a preacher; he cannot help

it ; and, so far as he cannot help it, his preaching will be elevating in proportion as it is truthful. He does not preach in the sense in which a moralist preaches, by arguing in favour of this or that doctrine, or expounding the consequences of opinions. It is not his business to prove, but to see, and to make you see. But, in another sense, he cannot help preaching, because his power over you is founded upon sympathy, upon his personal charms, upon the clearness with which he sees and the vividness with which he portrays the real nature of the instincts which make men lovable or hateful. What are really the most fascinating books in the language? I was impressed the other day by discovering that perhaps the most popular of all English books, judging by the number of editions, is Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*. To what does it owe its popularity? Obviously to the exquisite keenness of Goldsmith's perception of the moral beauty of a simple character, which is always saved from the charge of being unctuous or sentimental by the constant play of gentle and yet penetrative humour. Do we not love Charles Lamb for a similar reason? Why, again, do we love Scott, as all men ought to love him? Is it not because his Jeanie Deans and his Dandie Dinmont, and a hundred more characters, show the geniality, the manliness as well as the

shrewd common-sense of their creator, and his vivid perception of the elements which ennoble the national character which he loved so well? Why does the British public love Dickens so well? For his incomparable fun, no doubt ; but also because the fun is always associated with a keen perception of certain moral qualities which they regard with, it may be, excessive admiration. But to give no more examples, I am content to say that the enduring power of every great writer depends not merely on his intellectual forces, but upon the charm of his character—the clear recognition of what it really is that makes life beautiful and desirable, and of what are the baser elements that fight against the elevating forces. We are under intellectual obligations to the man of science who will tell us, for example, how mountain chains have been raised and carved into their present shape. But we are grateful to the great poets and prose writers, to Wordsworth and Mr. Ruskin, for interpreting and stimulating the emotions which make the vision of the great peaks a source of pure delight. We may, in the same way, thank the psychologist who can make more intelligible the principle of association of ideas, or trace the development of the moral sense or the social affections. But we love the man who, like Goldsmith, and Lamb, and Scott, and Wordsworth, has revealed to us by

actual portraits of typical characters, the sweetness and tenderness and truthfulness which may be embodied in humble characters. Love, says Wordsworth, of his shepherd lord—

Love had he found in huts where poor men lie,  
His daily teachers had been woods and rills;  
The silence that is in the starry sky,  
The sleep that is among the comely hills.

The power of discovering and of making us discover such thoughts in the huts of poor men and in natural scenery is the true prerogative of the poet, and it is to that power that he owes his enduring place in our hearts.

I have said this much because I think that it is in a perversion of these principles that we shall find some of the temptations to which the author is in these days most liable. I can only glance at them briefly. One perversion, for example, is indicated by the common use of the phrase "realism". This word has various meanings; but the commonest, perhaps, would not be misrepresented by saying that it involves a confusion between the functions of the man of science and the poet. In a scientific sense, it is a sufficient reason for setting forth any theory that you believe it to be true. The facts which you describe may be hideous and revolting: it is not the less desirable that they should be accurately known. The



---

poet and novelist may be equally justified in taking hideous and revolting facts into account. That, for example, is the duty of a satirist; and I am not at all concerned to say that satire is illegitimate—I think it perfectly legitimate. I should be the last to assert that a writer should confine himself to such facts as can be discussed with decency in presence of a young ladies' school. On the contrary, I think that, if not the most enviable privilege, it is sometimes a duty of the novelist to set forth vice and crime, and even, it may be, to set them forth in impressive and startling shapes. It is his duty to represent them truly and to make them intelligible; to show how they may be natural, and not to misrepresent even a villain. All I say is, that he should also recognise the fact that they are hideous and revolting. And, therefore, this is no excuse for the man who really dwells upon such facts, not because they are facts, but because he knows that such descriptions are the easiest way of attracting morbid tastes; and that he can get a readier market by being irreverent and indecent than by other expedients. To defend such work on the excuse of realism is simply to indulge in a bit of contemptible humbug, too transparent to need exposure. The purpose of an artist, you say, is to give pleasure, not to preach. That is perfectly true; but to give pleasure to whom?

If it is to give pleasure to the prurient, to the cynical, to the debauchee, to give the kind of pleasure which, to a pure-minded man, is pain, and of which even the blackguard is ashamed, then I will not quarrel over words, and ask whether it can be truly artistic, but I will simply reply that I should have a greater respect for a man who lived by picking pockets. But, you reply, it requires a great deal of skill. So does picking pockets, and so do some other kinds of human energy which I need not particularise. If the ethical judgment be really irrelevant æsthetically, the æsthetic judgment must be irrelevant ethically. If that doctrine be true, we are, therefore, quite at liberty to say that a thing may be beautiful and at the same time blackguardly and beastly. I will, however, express my own conviction, that what is disgusting to a right-minded man cannot be really beautiful, and that the sentiments which it offends cannot be put out of court simply because they are called moral. They have as good a right to be considered as any others.

There is a temptation of the opposite kind: the temptation to what I may briefly call sentimentalism. The virtue of idealism is as necessary as the virtue of realism; and every great writer shows his greatness by combining the two. The contradictory of the real is not properly the ideal, but the unreal—

which is a very different thing. For idealism means properly, as I take it, that quality in virtue of which a poem or a fiction does not represent merely the scientific or photographic reproduction of matters of fact, but incarnates an idea and expresses a sentiment. A great work imparts to us the impression made upon a mind of unusual power, reflectiveness, and emotional sensibility by some aspect of the world in which we all live, but which he can see more vividly than others. To be really impressive, therefore, it must correspond to facts and be the genuine product of experience. The erroneous idealism is that which perverts the truth in order to gain apparent emphasis; which deals in the impossible, the absurd, and the exaggerated; and supposes a world which cannot even be better than the actual, because it cannot exist; which, therefore, has the defect of being arbitrary and inconceivable. So political utopias are interesting in proportion as they suggest a legitimate construction, based upon actual facts and observed laws of human nature. As soon as we see that they presuppose a world of monstrosities, of impossible combinations of incompatible qualities, they become mere playthings. And the same is true of every work of imagination; as soon as it ceases to have a foundation in truth—to be other than realistic—it loses its real hold upon our sympathies. You solve

no problem when you call in a god to cut the knot. This is the tendency of the sentimentalist, who refuses to be bound by the actual conditions. His creations are ephemeral because only plausible, even to the imagination, so long as the illusions to which they are congenial survive. And he probably falls into the further error that the emotion which he utters becomes as factitious as the laws which he invents. The man who weeps because he is melted at the sight of misery, touches us; but when he weeps because he finds it pleasant, or because he wishes to make a public exhibition of his tenderness of heart, we find him out by degrees and call him a humbug and a sentimentalist. Sham feelings and moral facts are the staple of the sentimentalist and the cause of his inevitable decay.

These remarks may serve to suggest the temptations which most beset the author in our days, though peculiar to our day only in the degree in which authorship has become more professional. For the ideal author is the man who, having discovered truth, desires to reveal it to his fellows, or, being full of perceptions of beauty, cannot resist the impulse to embody them in words or outward symbols. But when he desires also to live by his powers, he is at once in a position of which all authors know the peril. He becomes self-conscious; for he has a per-

petual poultice of public favour or enmity applied to soften his fibres, and to make him feel, even in his study, that an eye is upon him and that he must so act as always to preserve attention. He is tempted to produce sensation at any cost—to shock and startle by horrors if he cannot move the sympathies by gentle arts: for a man who cannot command the pathetic, can, at least, always be disgusting. He can turn our stomachs if he cannot move our hearts. He is tempted, at least, to caricature—to show how keen is his perception by crude and glaring colours, and to indulge in the grotesque as an easy substitute for the really graphic; he can affect a facile cynicism to show how profound is his penetration, and display that marvellous knowledge of the world and the human heart, and that power of discovering the emptiness of all apparent virtues which is so common an endowment of young gentlemen upon their first initiation into real experience of life. There is nothing which the author affects so easily at his first start as the world weariness which comes from long experience and years of disappointed hope. And when a man has once gained applause for his sentiment, he finds himself his own covert rival, and is forced to substitute for the first “sprightly runnings” a fanciful pumping up of the last dregs of his old feelings. Nothing, unfortunately, is more common,

or could be more easily illustrated by examples of good writers, than the spectacle of the veteran trying to reproduce in cold blood the effects which he struck out spontaneously and unconsciously in youth. And, then, at every instant the poor author feels that he must keep up with the fashion ; he lives in fear of that verdict which will come some day, that he is an old fogey, and that he is transgressing those eternal principles which were discovered by some ingenuous youth a fortnight ago.

Some such danger is, indeed, shared by others than the author. It is the misfortune of his calling that success with him is intrinsically associated with notoriety. A man may do good work in many departments of life, of which no one will ever hear beyond a narrow circle. I hold, for my part, that the greatest part of the good work which is done in the world is actually of that kind, and that the best is done for the pure love of work. The world knows nothing of its greatest men, and as little, perhaps, of its best. But what would be the good of writing even a *Hamlet* or a *Divine Comedy* if nobody was to read it ? Some great writers, I know, have prided themselves on finding fit audience and few ; and I fully agree that a man who could really influence a few seminal minds might be well content with such a result of his labours. But, after all, the genuine aim of a

great author must be, directly or indirectly, to affect the world in which he lives, whether by changing its beliefs or stimulating its emotions. And, as a rule, he cannot do so without becoming known, and even known to vast numbers of readers. Some religious writers, the author, for example, of the *Imitation of Christ*, have influenced many generations, while absolutely concealing their identity. Even they must, at least, have desired that their works should be known; and the case is a rare one. For the author generally, success of the worthiest kind, success in enlightening, encouraging, and stimulating his fellow-men, is inextricably connected with success of a lower kind, the success measured by fame and popularity. That, of course, is equally the case with statesmanship: a statesman has to appeal to crowds, and is too apt to be fascinated by thunders of applause; public oratory, even in the pulpit, is a terrible stimulant to unworthy vanity. The author only differs in this, that his very function presupposes a temperament of more than average sensibility; that he does not get that case-hardening which is administered to the statesman by the opposition orator; and that publicity has a specially intoxicating effect upon the man whose proper home is in his study, and who, perhaps, leaves it only to mix with a circle of reverent admirers.



I have tried to indicate some of the obvious temptations of authors, especially so far as they are strengthened by the practice of authorship as a profession. They may be summed up by saying that they tend to degrade the profession into a trade, and a trade which has as many tricks as the least elevating kind of business. It would be, perhaps, desirable to end by deducing some definite moral. But, in the first place, I think that any such moral as I could give is sufficiently indicated by the statement of the dangers. And, in the second place, I do not think that there is any moral that can be regarded as peculiar to authors. For an author, after all, is a man, and, as all men ought to be, a workman. His power comes to this, that he is a man with a special capacity for exciting sympathy. That he should be a good workman, therefore, goes without saying ; and it follows that he should have a sense of responsibility in whatever department he undertakes ; that he should not bestow his advice upon us without qualifying himself to be a competent adviser ; nor write philosophical speculation without serious study of philosophy ; nor, if possible, produce poetry or even fiction without filling his mind by observation or training it by sympathy with the great movements of thought which are shaping the world in which we live. It is a sort of paradox which cannot be

---

avoided, that we must warn a man that one condition of all good work is that it should be spontaneous, and yet tell him that it should be directed to make men better and happier. It seems to be saying that the conscious pursuit of a given end would be inconsistent with the attainment of the end. Yet I believe that this is a paradox which can be achieved in practice on the simple condition of a reasonable modesty. The author, that is, should not listen to those who would exaggerate the importance of his work. The world can get on very well without it; and even the greatest men are far more the product than the producers of the intellectual surroundings. The acceptance of that truth—I hold it to be a truth—will help to keep in check the exaggerated estimate of the importance of making a noise in the world, which is our besetting sin, and help to make a regulating principle of what is a theoretical belief, that a man who is doing honestly good work in any department, whether under the eyes of a multitude or of a few, will be happiest if he can learn to take pleasure in doing it thoroughly rather than in advertising it widely. And, finally, with that conviction we shall be less liable to the common error of an author who grumbles at his want of success, and becomes morbid and irritable and inclined to lower his standard, when in reality he ought to remember

that he is as unreasonable as a marksman who should complain of the target for keeping out of the line of fire. "It is my own fault" is often a bitter reflection, but a bitter may be a very wholesome tonic.

## THE VANITY OF PHILOSOPHISING.

WHEN the Preacher exclaimed, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," he did not exclude his own wisdom "I communed with my own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all that have gone before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart hath great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." The Preacher, whoever he may have been, has uttered thoughts upon which many eloquent followers have expatiated. More than two thousand years have passed since the words were written; philosophies have risen and spread and decayed; and yet, in this year 1895, can we say that they have brought more than a multiplication of doubt? Has the increase of knowledge as yet diminished sorrow, or established any firm standing ground from which we may look upon the universe and say that the eternal riddle is, I will not say solved, but brought a

step nearer to solution? A great poet—I can't tell whether he lived in the twelfth or the nineteenth century, for the phrase is equally characteristic of either Omar Khayyām or Edward Fitzgerald—gives the same thought :—

Myself, when young, did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and saint, and heard great argument  
About it and about : but evermore  
Came out by the same door as in I went.

What, indeed, are eight or twenty centuries in the life even of this planet? There are moments at which we all have suddenly felt by flashes the sensation of being suspended in vast abysses of space and time : when we see, for example, a chart of the heavens which has been recently revealed to us by astronomers, and find that spaces between the stars shown to us by ordinary eyesight are filled in every direction with world beyond world, vast systems of worlds, worlds in every stage of evolution, growing out of nebulous vapour or sinking into eternal coldness : while the imagination is staggered and bewildered by the inconceivable vastness of the spaces indicated, and its own infinitesimal pettiness. If we stroll into a museum and look at the petrified bones of some grotesque monster, and after rejoicing, perhaps, that there is an end of him, we are struck by the thought of the vast lapse of ages during which

he was being slowly hammered out of some mere primitive form, and then slowly decayed, and was gradually elbowed out of existence by monsters a degree less preposterous than himself, and gain a new measure of the portentous lapse of time. The greatest of poets has summed up the impression in the phrase which Carlyle was fond of quoting: "we are such stuff as dreams are made of": and our little speck of existence a vanishing quantity in comparison of the infinite above and below and around us, which we dimly infer though we cannot distinctly realise it. If in such a mood, common at times to all who can think or feel, we take up some philosophical work, and find the writer complacently setting forth a cosmogony or a theory of the Universe; explaining how things came into being; what is the reason why they are not better or worse; what is the end of the whole drama: are we not justified in exclaiming with Carlyle:—

The builder of this Universe was wise,  
He planned all souls, all systems, planets, particles:  
The plan he shaped all worlds and æons by  
Was—Heavens!—was thy small nine-and-thirty articles!

Carlyle has been, to some of us, the most stimulating of writers, just because he succeeded in expressing, with unsurpassed power, the emotion which I must be content with indicating—the emotion which is

roused by sudden revelations of the infinitudes, the silences and eternities that surround us. We cannot keep it permanently before us; the present absorbs us, and its little interests seem to be all that is important. It is only at moments when, for example, we reflect that our action of a minute ago is already a part of the mysterious past, sinking downwards, and rapidly becoming invisible in the depths of the infinite ocean, that we are startled by a momentary pang, and feel as though to live with a constant sense of our insignificance would be to risk the paralysis of all our powers of thought and action. That way, we are inclined to say, lies madness. We shall lose our heads if we gaze too long into such tremendous depths. Possibly we may restore our equilibrium by meditating upon the infinitesimal, though possibly too we may rather feel that such meditations only reveal another infinite. I intended to make a few reflections suggested by such thoughts, when I found a guide, and, to a great extent, an ally, in a writer who has lately taken up the ancient parable. Mr. Balfour, in a book rather quaintly entitled *Foundations of Belief*, has dwelt upon the vanity of all known philosophy, and has shown, or appears to some of his readers to have endeavoured to show, that it is hopeless to lay any sound foundations on the little film of knowledge beneath which lie the great un-



---

known abysses. He tries to indicate some other basis, though, so far as I can understand him, the foundations of his edifice are ingeniously supported by the superstructure; and that is a kind of architecture which, to my mind, lacks stability. Through a large part of his argument, however, I find myself in the pleasanter position of an ally. He asserts, and I doubt whether any competent thinker would materially differ from him, that there does not, as a matter of fact, exist any established system of philosophic truth—any system upon which we can rely, as we do, in fact, rightly or wrongly rely, upon certain scientific doctrines. We no more doubt the truth of the Newtonian system of astronomy than we doubt that fire burns or that bread nourishes. But the briefest glance at the old systems of philosophy shows us, as Mr. Balfour says, nothing but imperishable ruins—imperishable æsthetically—but, logically, mere crumbling fragments. We can still read Plato with delight; but the delight is due to the beauty of style and exposition, not, certainly, to the conviction produced by his reasoning. Aristotle's philosophy is a marvel—for his time: but his theory of the Universe is no more tenable than his Natural Science. The luxuriant growths of later Greek philosophy are interesting only to the curious investigators of the pathology of the human intellect. The vast de-

velopment of scholastic philosophy in the middle ages showed only how far unlimited ingenuity and subtlety may lead in the wrong direction, if it starts with mistaken principles. It ended by upsetting the doctrines which it attempted to prove, and had finally to commit suicide, or fall before the insurrection of living thought. The great men who revolted against its tyranny in its later stages constructed new systems, which, to them, seemed demonstrable, but which, to us, are already untenable. We cannot accept Descartes, or Spinoza, or Leibnitz, or Bacon, or Hobbes, or Locke, as giving satisfactory or even coherent systems, or as having done more than lead to the thorough scepticism of Hume. If Kant presented one solution of the difficulties in which philosophy was landed, we have still to ask what precisely Kant meant; whether his criticism was simply all-destructive, or really left anything standing, and, if so, what it left standing; and who represents the proper line of development. Shall we, with Schopenhauer, pronounce Hegel to be a thorough impostor? and, if so, can we seriously accept Schopenhauer's own system? If, here and there, some people accept his theories for literary purposes, nobody will maintain that they rest upon any permanently settled foundation. If, again, we believe in Hegel, we have to make out what we mean by believing in Hegel, and

to which school of his followers we are to attach ourselves. I need not consider the polemic which Mr. Balfour has directed against the writers who have given a version of Hegelian principles in England. Personally, I agree with his criticisms in a general way; but I fancy that even the adherents of those principles would defend themselves mainly by declaring that they do not make such pretensions as he ascribes to them. They try, at most, to indicate a way of approaching, not of solving the problems. But, at least, they would claim to have done one thing: namely, to have proved the inadequacy of the rival system of empirical philosophy, accepted by the English followers of Locke, and now mainly represented for us by Mr. Herbert Spencer. I only add to this, that it is not a question of the convictions of any individual thinker, however eminent. Philosophies of every different variety have been not merely accepted by those who first devised them, but have been taken up in good faith by whole schools of disciples; they have been tested, on a large scale, by systematic application to all relevant questions, and one after the other has become bankrupt; has lost its hold on the world, and confessed that it leaves the riddle as dark as it was before. All that can be claimed for the greatest philosophers is, that they have, at least, proved that certain paths which seemed to lead

through the labyrinth, end in a deadlock ; that they have exposed certain fallacies by the process of provisionally believing in them ; and that they have buoyed certain shoals, and demonstrated that no channel leads in what seemed to be a promising direction. Is there any channel open ?

Once more, I might follow—I might even, if I had time, expand Mr. Balfour's argument in another direction. He has pointed out—not for the first time certainly—how men's beliefs are due not to reasoning, but to countless causes which prevent them from reasoning. The argument is too familiar, indeed, to require much emphasis. Some one, arguing in the days of the old orthodoxy upon the necessity of the true faith to salvation, put the case of a couple of infants deserted by their parents. One of them is carried off by a Mohammedan and the other by a Christian. Each will, of course, adopt the faith of the party into whose hands it has fallen ; and the problem was, whether the infant seized by the Mohammedan would be eternally damned, and the one taken by the Christian go straight to heaven ; and whether, on the whole, that would satisfy our sense of justice. The argument implies the inevitableness of error. Men not only do, but ought to hold, contradictory opinions. Take a Scottish Davie Deans, brought up in the shadow of John Knox's

pulpit ; a Tyrolese peasant, educated in the Catholic Church ; and a Mohammedan, living at Mecca ; and, of course, it is plain, not only that each will accept the creed which pervades what is for him the whole world known to him, but that as a reasoning being each is probably in the right. That is to say, the accessible evidence is in each case overwhelmingly in favour of the doctrine, inasmuch as the supposed reasoner is entirely unaware of the evidence which might be produced on the other side. But what is true of the peasant is true of the philosopher. Measured on a sufficient scale, the difference vanishes. This intellectual horizon is just as much limited, though not so narrowly limited. No one but a bigot would deny that a mediæval philosopher might accept on perfectly reasonable grounds the dogmas of the Catholic Church. The historical difficulties had not even been presented to his mind. He had no reason for doubting innumerable assumptions as to fact which have since turned out to be erroneous ; and if the method of his reasoning was itself fundamentally vicious, the fact only came to light gradually in the process of working out the results. We—including in the “we” the philosophers—have to approach truth by the help of assumptions, and by trying how in point of fact they will work ; it is so hard to remember that they are only assumptions

that we generally call them self-evident truths. Considering how many assumptions are involved even in the very structure of language itself; how we are led into all kinds of difficulties by the essential instrument of thought, which has been fashioned by the unconscious logic of our ancestors; it is not strange that the best that can be said of philosophies is, that they represent convenient working hypotheses. That, at least, seems to be a liberal view of their logical value. In another sense they are really to be considered as poetry, rather than as logic. They are modes of presenting certain conceptions of the world by apparently logical formulæ, instead of by concrete imagery; but, substantially, they represent the emotions with which men regard their dwelling place, and are radically imperfect if we insist upon considering them as providing us with correct plans and drawings of its various arrangements.

Let us look for a moment at another set of reflections upon which Mr. Balfour touches. What has been the influence of these systems upon men's lives? Have these provisional constructions, these fluctuating, conflicting, unstable combinations of pretentious formulæ, really decided or directed the course of human history? It would seem so, if you read certain histories of philosophy. They seem to suggest that the hinge upon which all the course of

human affairs ultimately turns is the growth of certain metaphysical conceptions. There is a preliminary difficulty in seeing how such pretensions can be established. The philosopher in his study or his lecture room discusses problems in which the enormously preponderating majority of the race has so little interest, that it is not even aware that there are any such problems to be discussed. He lays down dogmas so vague and unsatisfactory that half his hearers give up the attempt to understand, or understand them in a sense which the more intelligent half would utterly repudiate; and that intelligent half is itself divided into different schools, interpreting the dogmas in radically contradictory ways. Is it not hard to believe that speculation leads to vast results, when for ninety-nine men out of a hundred it is practically non-existent, and with the small minority it amounts to providing new weapons for endless controversy? We must, of course, admit that men's conduct is in some sense determined by their thoughts. Change the radical beliefs, and you will certainly change the whole constitution of society. And, again, it is obvious that in one sphere of thought the progress of inquiry is of vast importance. Nobody can deny that scientific and mechanical discoveries have, for good or evil, materially affected our lives. The great inventions



of modern times, from gunpowder and printing to the steam-engine and electricity, have changed things as much as if they had altered the physical constitution of the world. They have indeed altered it for us, for they have given us the means of applying forces previously dormant, and therefore for practical purposes non-existent. Such beliefs have an immediate bearing upon the practices of ordinary human beings. But if we are to set down all philosophies as at once untenable and as absolutely unknown to the enormous majority of mankind, it becomes difficult to understand by what process they come to influence, or apparently to influence, the position of the race. A philosopher frames his scheme of the universe to his own satisfaction ; but you and I hear nothing about it, and do not trouble ourselves to understand it, and go on working with our good old common-sense conceptions of things, leaving it to the philosopher to construct or destroy the fanciful system which he somehow supposes to lie beneath them. One answer is of course obvious. Religious and ethical systems, it is said, presuppose a philosophy: no one denies that men are profoundly affected by the gods whom they worship and the rules of conduct which they adopt ; and therefore the sceptic who is burrowing at the base may be ruining the whole superstructure, although his operations are

no more obvious upon the surface than those of some minute parasite. Accordingly, we are often told that revolutions are ultimately produced by speculation; and that old systems fall with a crash because some shrewd witness has been boring into the foundations upon which they really repose. The French Revolution, according to one familiar statement, was due to the freethinkers who had set about prying into the ultimate grounds of the old faith, and had succeeded in shaking the convictions necessary to social welfare.

That this argument expresses a truth is what I am so far from denying that I should be most anxious to give it emphasis. But what is precisely the truth expressed? Destroy the belief in a church as a social system, and the organisation will crumble. But what is the real cause of the loss of belief? Is it the logical argument that is effective? Does the philosophical revolution underlie the political or religious revolution, or is that to invert cause and effect? Let me take an example to illustrate my meaning. The doctrine of the "rights of man," proclaimed by the whole revolutionary school, was, it is said, the cause of the revolution. The destruction of the old order was caused by the sudden conviction which spread through Europe of the truth of this theory, and the consequent decay of the old authority.

Now we may proceed, if we please, to trace the origin of this doctrine back through certain speculations to the days of the Roman jurists, themselves influenced by the Stoical philosophy. The view suggested is that the doctrine was a kind of germ, a something which preserved its vitality through centuries, like the bacteria of modern physiologists, and which, somehow, developed a baleful or a beneficial activity about a century ago, and changed all the conditions of social equilibrium. But, if this be true, we naturally remark that the potency of the doctrine must have been due, not to the doctrine itself, which lay dormant so long, but to the conditions which suddenly made it effective. The doctrine, indeed, is so obvious, in a sense, that it is not to be doubted that anybody who once began to philosophise about laws and political constitutions, after they had reached a certain stage, would hit upon it in one shape or another. It is not comparable to those scientific discoveries which require patient thought and a dexterous combination of arguments: but one of the primary axioms which present themselves on the very threshold of inquiry. The mediæval peasant who put the question:—

When Adam dived, and Eve span,  
Who was then the gentleman?

was, probably, no great philosopher; but he was

giving the essential pith of the doctrine of liberty, fraternity, and equality. It may be regarded as an obvious logical canon, converted by an illegitimate process into a statement of fact. If I make any general statement whatever about men or beasts or stones, I, of course, assume that there is a corresponding class of things in respect of each of which the proposition is equally true. As soon as I say anything, therefore, about morality or politics, which is intended to be true of men in general, I assume, in this sense, that men are so far equal that something may be predicated, indifferently, of every member of the class man. It is very natural and easy to convert this into the proposition that the concrete men of whom I am speaking are, in some sense, actually equal. In doing so, however, I am either making a false statement, or begging the question. As a matter of fact, men are, in many respects, as far as possible from being equal. The real question, therefore, is whether the inequalities which undoubtedly exist are or are not relevant to the political inequalities which I have to consider. As a matter of fact, the inequalities which were challenged by the revolutionary writers were, as I think, and as most of us think, entirely unjustifiable. At any rate, they had, as a matter of fact, produced widespread discontent and bitter antipathies between classes. It

was the existence of these antipathies to which the outbreak was due. The peasant, for example, felt that he was forced to give up the fruit of his labour to the noble, and that the noble was discharging no duty to justify his demands. The peasant, probably, could not read; he was unaware that Rousseau or Voltaire was laying down principles which would cover his case; he had never even heard of philosopher or philosophy; only, when the time was ripe, when the upper orders had become useless, and the lower classes had accumulated a sufficient quantity of passion, of indignant or vindictive feeling, an outraged sense of justice, the crash came, and any formula which would cover the particular case was acceptable. The doctrine then made its fortune; not because it was true, or because it was demonstrable, but because it gave the shortest and simplest expression to the prevailing sentiment. The philosophical dogma, which had been lying idle for generations, doing no particular harm or good, was, suddenly, converted into a war-cry, the more effective because the real vagueness and uncertainty of its application enabled those who used it to save themselves the trouble of thinking or arguing. Instead of substituting particular grievances, and showing that this or that inequality in general was useless and objectionable, they could, in half a dozen

words, denounce all inequality, and be perfectly satisfied with a formula which was imposing for its generality, though true only in its particular application.

I take this familiar case, not only as familiar, but because it seems to me to be typical. Similar general remarks might, I fancy, be made about any of the great religious movements which have, undoubtedly, most profoundly affected human society. They are not due to the philosophers ; to the abstract meditations of refined thinkers upon ultimate principles ; but to great underlying social changes. Our Christian apologists of the last century held the quaint belief that a new creed was caused by the occurrence of certain miraculous facts, susceptible of legal proof. It is sufficiently obvious to us that this is to invert the process. Given the faith, and there is never any difficulty in supplying the miracles. No quantity of assertions as to miraculous events would have the slightest effect, unless there were a predisposition to accept them. The same answer applies to the theory that a new religion owes its success to the discovery of new moral truths. In the first place, there are, properly speaking, no sudden discoveries in morality ; and in the next place, the mere statement of a moral doctrine, and even the presentation of a lofty moral type, can have little importance unless the soil is already

prepared, and the doctrine is but the overt utterance of the sentiments which are seeking for expression. The only explanation that we can give of such events is the social explanation. There are periods, that is in history, when the old order is out of joint ; when society has outgrown the institutions which were adequate at a previous stage, and when, therefore, the beliefs associated with them become oppressive, and can no longer pass without challenge ; when different races and nations have been brought into collision or combination, and crushed together into new forms by conquest and commerce ; when, therefore, the several creeds are no longer supported by the patriotism which has ceased to have a meaning ; when a vast amalgam of different faiths and modes of life has been formed out of many heterogeneous elements ; and thus a need is created for some wider and more comprehensive system of belief corresponding to the general needs of society. In that case the influence of the philosopher may be of some importance, because he can do something towards suggesting the most workable compromise, and of exposing superstitions which have lost their old support, and the instinctive loyalty of their adherents. Even then his voice will not be predominant. The creed will survive which is most suited to the state of the average intellect ; it will include a large element



of the ancient modes of thought, which still insist upon finding some satisfaction, and which, indeed, have a strange vitality beneath the surface, even when explicitly disavowed by the official interpreters of the faith.

Now, if this be accepted as a rough sketch of the actual course of the development of belief, what is the conclusion as to the philosopher's function? Does it go to suggest that philosophy is but a vanity and vexation of spirit, and does it reduce the philosopher to a humbler position than is sometimes claimed for him? My answer would be, in the first place, that the case against philosophy would have to be frankly admitted if the criterion sometimes tacitly suggested be the true one. Nothing could be more hopeless than the claim of any philosophy whatever to have laid down a definitively satisfactory plan of things in general. When Mr. Balfour observes that an Aristotle or Aquinas or Descartes has not laid down a tenable theory of the universe, I can only add that the very phrase—theory of the universe—conveys a sufficient refutation. It is idle, or worse than idle, to imagine that we can lay down, or even hope to lay down, anything of the kind. It needs only one of those glances into the surrounding infinities which I have suggested, or the briefest survey of the history of philosophy, to reveal the sheer impossibility of the

attempt. No one, perhaps, ever quite imagined that his speculation could really lay bare the ultimate ground plan of things in general. But, certainly, philosophers have, at times, thought, or spoken as if they thought, that they could construct a body of first principles which should be to knowledge in general what a science is to some particular application,—the general theory of physics, for example, to astronomy. Philosophy would then be a system of such ultimate principles. The day for such systems has, I think, passed. We have learnt that it is for ever impossible to spin real knowledge out of pure logic. What the universe, or the little bit of it that we know, actually is, can only be learnt by experience; and if experience presupposes categories or forms of intuition, still, without experience, they remain empty; as incapable of producing truth as a mill of grinding flour without corn. Philosophers must admit that on such terms we get only “brain cobwebs”; ingenious feats of intellectual legerdemain, where the operator shows his skill by dexterously hiding away his assumptions, and bringing them out at the end as triumphantly demonstrated conclusions. The more modest ideal, which is now presented to us, is what is called the unification of knowledge. That means, no doubt, that we have to bring our theories into harmony and consistency; to get rid of the

hypothetical and conjectural elements which have intruded themselves from earlier and cruder speculation; and so to analyse the primary factors of thought and the most general conceptions, that we may not have to assume in one relation what we dispute in another. Even this process is, no doubt, exceedingly difficult; it is difficult partly because the human mind has, generally speaking, to begin at the wrong end; to proceed upon postulates which break down here and there and leave inconvenient fragments remaining elsewhere; partly because some philosophers are still open to the charge that they raise a dust and then complain that they cannot see; and, briefly, because, in one way or other, what with the dulness of the ordinary mind and what with the over-subtlety of the acute, our thoughts and beliefs have got into intricate tangles, which will require enormous patience and judgment to wind off and weave into a satisfactory tissue. Genuine philosophers, doubtless, will learn in time how to set about the work. It will probably strike them that instead of evolving pretentious systems of theology, and ethics, and politics, and art, each purporting to give an exhaustive theory of the subject, and each destined to melt away, leaving some infinitesimal residuum of real suggestion, they will have to follow a slower method of gradual and tentative investiga-

tion. If so, we must undoubtedly assign to philosophy a more modest position than has sometimes been claimed for it. It must resign its claim to a vision of transcendental realities, to a knowledge of things in themselves, and of the ultimate groundwork of the universe. It has not, I hold, a subject-matter peculiar to itself; it reveals no principles belonging to a separate sphere of thought; it corresponds simply to the attempt to correct and harmonise the cruder thoughts of the average human being, and to state explicitly in their purity the principles which have been all along implicitly involved in his ordinary observations. It is, therefore, not a substantive, but an adjective; philosophy is not a distinct department of thought, and cannot be defined by itself. All we can say is, that we think philosophically in so far as we think rightly. When our mode of conceiving the world includes no heterogeneous or conflicting element, we shall be philosophers; but we shall not, in that capacity, have a separate dominion of our own.

Now, it will probably do no harm to philosophers more than to other men, to be impressed with a sense of modesty and a right appreciation of the necessary limitations of their enterprise. You have been trying to soar beyond the atmosphere, and you will make the better use of your wings when you

learn that they won't support you in a vacuum. Your failure is not due to the want of aquiline powers of flight, but to the melancholy truth that even an eagle can't do much in an air-pump. Is not that a rather consoling reflection? But here the philosopher begins to be recalcitrant. You are not lowering my pretensions, he says, but attacking the power of man to attain truth upon any terms. All that is given to us in experience is the effect of underlying causes; if the causes vary the effects would vary; and, unless, therefore, you can get back to the cause, your knowledge must remain empirical and radically uncertain. Destroy all transcendental truths, and the phenomenal world itself becomes a mere shifting phantasmagoria, on which we can trace only coincidences and sequences, but are entirely unable to say that they will ever recur again. The argument, of course, raises the recollection of library upon library of controversy. I can only touch one point. Practically, we do not trouble ourselves about this difficulty. We are quite convinced that we know a great many things: we are sure that the sun will rise and set to-morrow; we have no doubt as to the properties of the ordinary objects, of trees and stones and steam-engines; every action of our lives implies a certain confidence in what is called the uniformity of nature; and it is plain enough that even if our knowledge be,

in some sense, only a knowledge of probabilities, yet, from its effect upon conduct, it may be exactly the same as a knowledge of certainties. There may be an indefinite distance between the "necessary truth" that two and two make four and the empirical truth that a stone will fall; but if all the evidence attainable goes to prove that the stone will fall, I should be as foolish not to act upon that hypothesis as not to assume the truth of the arithmetical formula. Now, it is, of course, the growth within recent generations of vast systems of such truths which has alarmed the philosopher. He contrasts his own fluctuating and conflicting dogmas with the steady growth and assured results and mutual confirmation of the established physical sciences. He fears that they will obtain a prestige which will enable them to crush him and sweep his pretended knowledge into the limbo of alchemy and astrology and scholastic logomachy. Here comes in the argument which is really the keystone of Mr. Balfour's whole theory; and, as I cannot accept it, I must dwell upon its true nature. It looks, at first sight, like a retort upon the men of science. Your knowledge, he seems to say, is as vain as your antagonist's. Your physics, and astronomy, and chemistry, and physiology are mere empty shows, like the metaphysical theories that have gone to their long home in histories of philo-



sophy. But to say this would be to accept complete scepticism, and a kind of scepticism which Mr. Balfour would, I am sure, disavow. He believes, of course, just as strongly as any one of us believes, in the astronomical theories of Newton and Laplace; or in the mathematical theories of the great physical sciences. That in which he disbelieves is a kind of bastard science called "naturalism," which, as he tells us, leads to contradictory or incoherent results. The naturalist, it appears, proposes to confine himself to the evidence of the senses, and ends by accepting a view of the world entirely inconsistent with the sensible perceptions. I see a green field: an object which has visual and other properties recognised by my organs of sense. No, says this misguided naturalist, you do not see what you suppose; what really happens is, that there is a vast whirlpool of atoms impinging upon each other and setting up vibrations, the last set of which is communicated to another set of atoms, called my optic nerve. These atoms, by their very nature imperceptible to the senses, are the only realities. We thus start from the senses and we get a world beyond the senses, a world which is a mere dance of infinite multitudes of bits of matter performing all manner of extraordinary gyrations and evolutions. The sensible impressions of colour, sound, and so forth, are mere illusions,



somehow arising in a figment called the mind. This mind is a mere phantom—an unreal spectator of things and events, among which it has no place, and upon which it exercises no influence.

Now, let me say first that I agree with Mr. Balfour that the doctrine thus imputed to the “naturalist” is absurd. I do not believe, for I cannot believe, that I am only a dance of atoms. I “cannot” believe, I say, for the words are to me meaningless. My sensations and emotions are to me the typical realities. I cannot doubt the real existence of pain and pleasure, grief and joy, whatever else I may doubt. I believe, for example, that my toothache is a reality; and nobody will ever persuade me that it is merely a set of molecular changes in my tooth. That it, in some way, is dependent upon such changes I fully believe; but that is quite a different statement. And, secondly, I agree with Mr. Balfour (or with what I take to be Mr. Balfour’s belief) that the scientific doctrines which are reached by help of these atoms are established truths. I believe those doctrines, not because I am convinced by the arguments, which I may not have examined or be capable of examining; nor simply because I trust, though I do trust, in the ability and the candour of the scientific reasoners; but because the doctrines can be and have been independently verified. I believe, that is,

in modern astronomy because it has enabled modern astronomers to predict eclipses, and enabled Adams and Leverrier to discover Neptune. That is the conclusive proof; for it is impossible to suppose that the power of prediction should be a result of erroneous belief, and such proofs are verifiable by anybody who can observe the phenomena.

Here, then, we have the difficulty, the difficulty upon which the whole of Mr. Balfour's argument depends. Solve it, and the whole sceptical argument crumbles. The naturalistic theory, we both say, is incredible. The scientific doctrines based upon it are, as we both admit, unassailable. How is this? I reply, first, because the atoms represent nothing more than a logical scaffolding which enables us to infer one set of sensible phenomena from another. We start from phenomena and we end with phenomena. When we have discovered the so-called "law"—the connecting formula—we can remove the hypothesis as the engineer can remove the provisional supports when he has once got the keystone into his arch. That this is so appears, I think, from the whole scientific procedure. How is the atomic theory obtained? Not by any direct observation of atoms themselves. They are, as Mr. Balfour says, not only not objects of observation, but incapable by their nature of ever being directly observed. The

man of science begins by saying, *if* the phenomena of light correspond in some way to a vibration of atoms, the atoms must vibrate in such and such ways. He finds, again, that the laws so discovered will give the law of other phenomena of light; and he argues quite correctly that his hypothesis is for his purpose verified. That is, it has enabled him to discover a verifiable and verified formula. In order to do this he has assumed from the very first the theory which of course appears in his conclusions. All physical science consists ultimately in giving definite formulæ in terms of space and time. It is therefore assumed that the atoms are to have no qualities except those which are definable in terms of space. We exclude any other quality because our whole purpose is to obtain purely geometrical measurements. We have asked how those atoms, infinitesimal bits, so to speak, of solid space, arranged in certain positions, must move in order to correspond to the law given by observation, and we have therefore, of course, predetermined that our answer must come out in terms of atoms.

But, now, what is the error of the "naturalist"? Simply that he has converted the scientific doctrine into an ontological doctrine. He really knows nothing, and cannot possibly know anything, about his atoms, except just this, that they give the law of

the phenomena. He has nothing whatever to say to them in any other relation. If he proceeds, as Mr. Balfour says that he proceeds, to declare that nothing exists except atoms, that they are the ultimate realities, that they are "things in themselves," or objects independent of any subject, he is going beyond his tether, passing from science to transcendental metaphysics, and getting into hopeless confusion. In fact, after he has done his worst we may still follow Berkeley and deny the existence of matter, or declare with Clifford that atoms are only bits of mindstuff, or adopt any other metaphysical theory we please. The atoms at most are things which we judge from the analogy of the senses; and it is a pure illusion to suppose that they can ever take us into an extra-sensible world. They represent not only a convenient but an indispensable contrivance for enabling us to formulate scientific laws, such as those of light and heat; but they take us no further.

In a remarkable passage, Mr. Balfour sketches an analogy, which gives the application of this to philosophical or theological questions; and I will venture to give my own interpretation of the argument because it seems to lead to the real point. We believe, he says, in a scientific theory of heat, although our view of the "realities" has changed. People once thought that

heat was a substance. They now hold it to be a mode of motion. Yet our "scientific faith" (our faith, I suppose, that things are hot, and that their heat varies according to certain assigned laws) remains unaffected. On the other hand, he says, if we cease to believe in the Christian doctrine of the atonement, we cease also to have that "sense of reconciliation" between God and man which the doctrine was intended to explain. This he seems to regard as a kind of melancholy paradox. Why is the scepticism harmless in science and fatal in theology? First, what are the admitted facts? A man of science propounds a theory of heat. If his theory does not give us the observed laws, we reject it and adopt a more successful theory. In any case, we, of course, continue to believe in heat. We may know facts without knowing their causes; as, for example, the fact of gravitation, which is not the less certain because it is at present an ultimate fact. Otherwise our knowledge would be limited indeed; for even if the cause (in the scientific sense) were given, we should still have to ask, what is the cause of that cause? If heat is due to certain systems of atoms, we might still inquire how the atoms came to occupy their places, and possess the properties which they actually have. An effect "depends upon" a cause, as we naturally say; but it does not follow that the

knowledge of the effect depends upon the knowledge of the cause. Now, what are the facts which correspond to the facts of heat in the theory of the atonement? If we believe in a certain being, an anthropomorphic deity, who will punish us or reward us, it is, of course, obvious that if we cease to believe in him we shall cease to desire to be reconciled to him. So if I believed that the warmth of my house depended upon a fire next door, and then discovered that no such fire existed, I should of course cease to care about lighting it. In this there is nothing which wants explanation. I suppose, therefore, that what Mr. Balfour means is, that if men have certain emotions,—remorse, for example, or what is called a conviction of sin,—and then learn to reject the theory by which these emotions were explained, they cease also to feel the emotions. In fact, he emphatically accepts the view that, if we cease to accept theology, we shall cease to be moral. The perversity of a few wretched “naturalists” in continuing to be moral is explained as a case of survival; the moral naturalist is the parasite who draws his sustenance from the organism which he infests. Let us consider the scientific analogy. I believe in heat, and I accept a scientific theory just as far as it gives me verified laws of heat. I believe, too, in the existence of conscience; that is,

I believe that people have real emotions, such as remorse and shame, which correspond to the name. I hold that to be a fact of experience. It would have to be explained, again, so far as explanation is possible, by psychology in the first instance, as heat must be explained by scientific theories. Remorse is a fact, as heat is a fact ; and an explanation would consist in giving accurately its place in the moral organism and the laws of its operation. The explanation furnished by any given psychology, by "association," for example, must be accepted or rejected in so far as it explains or fails to explain the facts. If some theory about spiritual "monads" enabled us to show what the conscience is, and how it is, in fact, stimulated or suppressed, we should accept it in the same way as we accept the physical theory of heat. As yet, I need hardly say, no such result has been achieved ; and psychology is still far too vague to offer any definite laws of the emotional nature. But in any case, how can a theory about facts make the facts themselves vanish ? Would not grief be real just as pain would be real if we could clearly explain how and why it occurred ? Why should the "sense of reconciliation" vanish because we show the conditions of its existence ? The reason of Mr. Balfour's difficulty, I think, appears from what I have said. In the physical theory we can



draw the line clearly between the scientific and the philosophical spheres. Mr. Balfour can accept the scientific truth, though he does not accept the doctrine which results from translating it into ontology. But the boundary between psychology and philosophy is far less distinct. We constantly confound questions about the constitution of man, as known to us by experience, with questions about supposed intuitions of ultimate truth. The fact that sin causes remorse is interpreted as meaning that remorse actually *is* a knowledge of an avenging deity; and when the emotion is thus identified with the belief, it becomes easy to suppose that to destroy the belief is also to destroy the emotion. I think, indeed, that fallacies of that kind are among the commonest in philosophical writings. Now, of course, psychology has something to say in this matter. It may help, and I think that it has helped us to explain how men come to believe in anthropomorphic deities, and to invest them with the attributes of human rulers. But in that way it tends to show not that the conscience is caused by the belief, but to show how, under certain conditions, it has given rise to a belief by other than logical grounds. It suggests no probability that the conscience will disappear with the fallacy, but only that it will act differently when enlightened by a

different logic. Conscience disappears no more than heat disappears, when both are explained ; though the conduct which the emotions or the sensations determine will, of course, be affected.

And now, I can say what I take to be the difficulty, and the escape. Mr. Balfour draws a kind of parallel between the scientific creed, which is, as he would put it, "based upon" a metaphysical doctrine, and the theological creed, which has a similar foundation. If the metaphysical foundation is so uncertain in both cases, must not the scientific be as uncertain as the theological? If we know nothing about atoms, or, on the other hand, about souls, we must be either sceptical in both cases, or credulous in both. There are the same underlying difficulties, and if we manage to overlook them in the case of science, why not overlook them in the case of theology? Conversely, if we elect to be sceptics in theology, how can we escape from scepticism in science? And, as a thorough-going scepticism is, doubtless, an impossible state of mind in practice, the conclusion of many people will be to accept belief in spite of certain gaps in our logical foundations. This, no doubt, is eminently convenient for the "constructive" process adumbrated by Mr. Balfour, which I certainly regard as extra-logical. But is any such dilemma really offered to us? The obvious answer is, that scientific truth,

---

as Mr. Balfour admits, is not "based upon" metaphysical theory. The astronomical doctrine of a Newton remains equally valid, whatever is the ultimate nature of space or laws or atoms; whether we are materialists or empiricists or idealists. The philosophical "basis" is not really a set of truths which we must know before we can know the astronomical theory; but simply a set of hypotheses which have to conform to the truths given by experience. The unassailable truths are just the facts which we observe, and which science enables us to describe accurately and state systematically. If a metaphysical doctrine has any bearing upon these facts, which seems to be doubtful, it must conform to the facts, and not the facts to it. So long as no such theory is proved, we can afford to remain metaphysically sceptical without losing our hold upon the scientific truth. Now, I should say, what is true of the physical sciences is true of all our knowledge. We may study the moral sciences as we can study the physical sciences. We can observe and colligate the facts of emotion and volition, as we can observe the position of the stars and the laws of heat. Therefore, in so far as theology is an attempt to give a theory of the universe in general, we must accept or deny the doctrines just in so far as they serve to explain or fail to explain the facts.

But, in any case, the facts will remain unaltered, and will not vanish because we may be unable to understand them. But theology corresponds, also, not to the scientific method, but to the ontological inquiries which are represented by Mr. Balfour's "naturalism". Both doctrines, as I should say, lead to incoherence, to contradictions covered by ambiguous language, and to hopeless difficulties, which, in theology, are described as inscrutable mysteries. I am, therefore, quite ready, with Mr. Balfour, to reject naturalism, but, on the same grounds, I also reject the transcendental theology. Attainable truth is equally independent of all such theories; and were it otherwise, we should be doomed to hopeless scepticism. Mr. Balfour's analogy, therefore, apparently upsets his conclusion. I believe in heat, and I believe in the conscience. I reject the atoms, and I reject the doctrine of atonement. I reject it, if it be meant for science, because, so far from explaining the facts, the facts explain how the false doctrine was generated. I reject it, if it is meant for philosophy, because, like other transcendental theories, it leads to hopeless controversies, and appears to me to be incredible as soon as any such theology as is tenable by a philosopher is substituted for the crude theology of a savage.

We are driven to scepticism, then, if we first de-

clare that scientific knowledge depends upon metaphysical theory; and then that all metaphysical theory is moonshine. I do not accept the first principle; and I hold that the danger to morals from metaphysical difficulties is pretty much the same as the danger that the stars will leave their courses if we adopt a wrong theory of an astronomy. We fancy that when we are explaining facts, we are, somehow, creating them; as the meteorologist in *Rasselas* observed the clouds till he came to think that he caused the rain. The facts upon which morality depends are the facts that men have certain emotions; that mothers love their children; that there are such things as pity, and sympathy, and public spirit; and that there are social instincts upon the growth of which depends the vitality of the race. We may, of course, ask how more precisely these emotions act, and what functions they discharge. We may make historical and psychological and metaphysical inquiries; and we may end, if ever we reach such a consummation, by establishing what we may call a science of ethics. But the facts do not depend upon the explanation. The illusion of their dependence is easily produced. You make your theory of morality, and then you define morality as a belief in the object required by your theory. It follows, of course, that morality will disappear with the belief—or

else that your theory is wrong. Morality, said some people, is a belief in future rewards and punishments. If that belief disappears, morality—that is, their morality—must disappear too. But that morality—taken as the actual sentiment which they have erroneously defined—should disappear also, no more follows than it follows that heat will disappear when we discover that there is no such thing as the old imaginary substance of heat. The doctrine is now more generally urged in a different form. Theology, it is said, is essential to morality. Such bold assertions may be best met by a dogmatic assertion of the inverse case. Theology, as I hold, is not the source of the moral instincts, but, under certain conditions, derives its real power from them. Theology, in the first place, is a word including not only heterogeneous but contradictory meanings,—Baal and Jehovah, the Mumbo-jumbo of the negro and Spinoza's "ens absolute infinitum". To the enormous majority of the human race, the more metaphysical conception is hopelessly unintelligible. When a savage expresses his crude sense of duties to the tribe under the form of belief in an ancestral ghost, is the morality made by the belief, or the belief generated by the incipient moral emotion? Does he believe in God or really in a man like himself, and respected precisely because he is like himself? Is not the truth



tacitly acknowledged by the more philosophical religions? Their adherents admit that the God of philosophy is too abstract a Being to excite any emotion; he fades into Nature or the Unknowable, and it is impossible to love one whom, by his very definition, you can neither benefit nor injure and whose omnipotence makes even justice a mockery. Therefore, they make a God out of a man, and by boldly combining in words two contradictory sets of attributes, make what in theology is called a mystery, and in common sense called by a different name. Does not that amount to confessing that the true source of morality is in the human affections of like for like, and not in that sentiment towards a transcendental object of which you have chosen to make your definition? And, finally, if we ask what is the relation of theology to morality, from a historical point of view, we see the same result. Undoubtedly, theology has been a bulwark of morality in one way. It has expressed the veneration of mankind for the most deeply-seated customs of the race. It has been the form through which, though not the cause owing to which, men have expressed the importance of adhering to certain established institutions of the highest importance to mankind. Briefly, therefore, it represents the conservative instincts. But, for that reason, it has naturally lagged behind an ad-



vancing morality. The newer religions have been precisely protests against the objectionable conduct of the old-fashioned deities who retained the manners and customs of a more barbarous period; and have, therefore, been regarded by the older faith, sometimes with justice, as atheistic. Without referring to the familiar cases, I am content to appeal to the present day. What are the relative positions of the theologian and his opponent during the modern phase of evolution? The theologian has, in the main, maintained the sanctity of old institutions and customs; and I do not doubt that he has rendered a useful service. But the demand for justice, for the abolition of slavery, of the hardships of the poor and oppressed, the desire to construct society upon a wholesomer ideal, has been generated, not by theological speculation, but by the new relations into which men have been brought and the new sentiments developed. It has been accepted most fully by men hostile to all theology, by the free-thinker, the atheist, and the materialist, whom the orthodox denounces as criminal. Doubtless the denouncer has excuses: the reformer may err in the direction of excessive demolition; but the very survival of the older creeds depends, as we all see, upon their capacity for assimilating and finding utterance for the moral convictions which have arisen outside of

their limits, and, generally, in defiance of their authority. To say, therefore, that the morality depends upon the survival of the metaphysical theory, seems to me to be inverting the true relation.

I end by suggesting what is to my mind the true moral of these speculations. The vanity of philosophising means the vanity of certain philosophical pretensions; of the chimerical belief that the philosopher lays down the first principles of belief in ethics or in other departments of life, in such a sense that the destinies of the race or of knowledge depend upon accepting and applying his principles. His function is a humbler one, though one of vast importance. The great philosophical systems have vanished, though they have cleared the air. They were primitive attempts at construction; results of the fact that we have to act before we can think; and to assume postulates which can only be verified or falsified by the slow experience of ages. But the process by which truth is advanced is not confined to the philosopher; or perhaps we should rather say that some sort of crude philosophy is embedded even in the feeblest and earliest speculations of mankind. Our thoughts are guided by an implicit logic long before we have even a conception of logic in the abstract, or have the least thought of codifying and tabulating its formulæ. So

every savage who begins to make a tool is exemplifying some mechanical principle which will not be put into accurate and abstract language till countless generations have passed. Every one at the present day who is using his wits is philosophising after a fashion, and is contributing towards the advancement of philosophy. He is increasing the mass of still more or less chaotic knowledge, the whole of which is to that philosopher what the particular set of facts is to the student of physical science. The philosopher has not to evolve first principles out of himself, so much as to discover what are the principles which have been unconsciously applied; to eliminate the obsolete elements; to bring the new into harmony; to verify them, or describe how they may be verified; and so to work towards the unification and systematisation of knowledge in general. Probably he will make a great many blunders in his task; but it may be some comfort to reflect that even blunders are often useful, and that he is not in the terribly responsible position of really framing laws for the universe or for man, but only of clearing up or codifying the laws which are already in operation.

## FORGOTTEN BENEFACTORS.

I WAS reading not long ago some remarks\* which impressed me at the time, and upon which, as it came to pass, I have had reason to reflect more seriously. The writer dwelt upon the vast services which have been rendered to the race by men of whom all memory has long since faded away. Compare, he said, the England of Alfred with the England of Victoria ; think of the enormous differences which have been brought about in thirty generations ; and then try to estimate how large a share of all that has been done in the interval should be put to the credit of thousands who have long sunk into oblivion, and whose achievements, by the very necessity of the case, can never be properly estimated. A few great names mark every period ; the great statesmen, the great churchmen and warriors, are commemorated in our official histories ; they are placed upon exalted pedestals ; and to them is attributed everything that was done in their time, though, but for the co-opera-

\* See the "Wealth of Nature," in *Essays by a Barrister* [Sir James Fitzjames Stephen].

tion of innumerable nameless fellow-labourers, they would not have been provided even with the foundations upon which their work was necessarily based.

This remark recalls the familiar discussion about the importance of the individual. Is the hero whom we are invited to worship everything, or is he next to nothing? Is it true, as some writers put it, that had Cleopatra broken her nose, or had a cannon ball gone a hair's breadth further to the right or left when Napoleon was directing the siege of Toulon, "the whole course of history would have been changed"? Or is it rather true that, as some philosophers would say, no man is indispensable, nor even any man very important: that, if any even of the greatest of men had died of the measles in his infancy, we should have carved a different set of letters upon the pedestals of our statues, but the course of affairs would have run in much the same channel? I will not seek to discuss that old theme, to which it is evident that no very precise answer can be given. It is clearly a question of degree. Nobody can deny that a great man has an influence in the spheres of action and of thought; but to attempt to say how great an influence he has, how far he depends upon others or could be replaced by others, involves considerations lying in the unprofitable region of vague conjecture. This only I wish to note. It seems

often to be suggested that there is something degrading or ungenerous in taking a side against the importance of the hero. It raises a suspicion that you are a valet, capable of supposing that men are distinguished by the quantity of lace on their coats, and not by the intensity of the fire in their souls. And, moreover, the view is fatalistic: it supposes that the destinies of the race are determined by what are denounced as blind "laws," and not by the passions and aspirations which guide their energies. To me it seems that it would be easy enough to retort these imputations. I cannot feel that a man of generous sympathies should be therefore inclined to a doctrine which would tend to make the future of the race a matter of chance. The more you believe in the importance of the great men, the more you have to admit that our progress depends upon the innumerable accidents which may stifle the greatest as easily as the smallest career. If some great social change was so absolutely dependent upon the leader who first put into words the demand upon which it is based, or who led the first forlorn hope which made victory possible, that his loss would have been the loss of his cause, it follows that the cause might have been lost if a crust of bread had gone the wrong way. It ought surely to be pleasanter if we are entitled to hold that we have a stronger

ground of confidence; that the great victories of thought and action prove the diffusion of enthusiasm and courage through a wide circle; and that the fall of the chief is sure to make room for a worthy successor. The wider and deeper the causes of progress, the more confidently we can derive hope from the past, and accept with comparative equanimity even the most painful catastrophes.

Nor can I agree that such a view implies any want of susceptibility to the claims of the hero. I do not think that we can pay homage too cheerfully to the great men who form landmarks in history. I admit, most gladly, that the admiration which we feel for such men; the thrill which stirs us in reading of the great patriots and martyrs of the past; the reverence which we are now and then able to pay to a contemporary—to a Lincoln, proving that political action may represent real faiths, not party formulæ; to a Gordon, impersonating the sense of duty; or a Father Damien, sacrificing his life for the lepers—is one of the invaluable elements of moral cultivation. But I do not see the connection between this and the desire to exalt the glory of the great man by ignoring the unknown who followed in his steps, and often made them possible. I have not so far attained to the cosmopolitan point of view that my blood is not stirred by the very name of Nelson. Nay, however



cosmopolitan I might become, I hope that my sympathies would never blind me to the greatness of the qualities implied in his patriotic devotion. My cosmopolitanism would rather, I hope, lead me to appreciate more generously the similar qualities in his antagonists, and, also, the similar qualities in the "band of brothers" whom he was proud to lead. I should be sorry so to admire Nelson as to forget the sturdy old race of sea dogs who did their duty, and helped him to do his in a memorable way, some ninety years ago. I would rather believe than not that, had Nelson been killed at the Nile, there were many among his followers who, had the chance come to them, would have led the *Victory* at Trafalgar, and have made England impregnable. "I trust we have within this realm five hundred good as he" is surely the more heroic tone. But, to drop the old-fashioned appeal to patriotic spirit, is it not true that, in every department of life, it is more congenial to our generous feelings to remember the existence and the importance of those who have never won a general reputation? This has come to be a commonplace in the sphere of scientific discovery. We find, over and over again, that the great discoverer has been all but anticipated by his rivals; that his fame, if not his real greatness, depends upon the circumstance that he has just anticipated by a year, or,

perhaps, in extreme cases, by a generation, results to which a comparatively second-rate thinker would have been competent a few years later. The winner of the race is apt to monopolise the glory, though he wins only by a hair's breadth. The familiar instance of Darwin and Mr. Wallace is remarkable, not because the relation of the two thinkers was unique, but because, unfortunately, the generosity with which each acknowledged the merit of the other was exceptional. A great discovery is made when the fertile thought is already going through the process of incubation in a whole circle of intelligent minds; and that in which it first comes to the birth, claims, or, at least, receives, the whole merit, by a right of intellectual primogeniture not much more justifiable than the legal right. Admitting, again, in the fullest sense, the value and the difficulty of that last step which has to be made in order to reach the crowning triumph, it would surely be ungenerous to forget the long series of previous explorations by which alone it was made possible. There must have been countless forgotten Newtons and Descartes', who, in their day, had to exert equal powers in order to discover what are now the most familiar truths; to invent the simplest systems of arithmetical notation, or solve the earliest geometrical problems, without which neither a Newton nor a Descartes would have

been possible. And what is true in science is, surely, equally true of activities which touch most of us more nearly. Of all undeniable claims to greatness I suppose the most undeniable to be the claim of the founders of religions. Their disciples are so much impressed by their greatness that they regard them as supernatural beings, or, in other words, as beings who are the sole and indispensable causes of all the consequences attributed to the prevalence of their doctrines. We are told, constantly, and often as though it were too obvious to need proof, that every moral improvement which has taken place in the world since the origin of Christianity, is due to Christianity, and that Christianity itself is entirely due to its founder. Human nature was utterly corrupt until the Deity became incarnate in the form of a Jewish peasant; and every social or moral step which has since been made in advance—and not one of the unfortunate backslidings by which the advance has since been trammelled—is a direct consequence of that stupendous event. This is the theory of the importance of the individual, raised, so to speak, to its very highest potency. We not only attribute the most important and far-reaching of all changes to a single agent, but declare that that agent cannot have been human, and indeed cannot have been less than the first cause of all changes. I

shall not, of course, discuss the plausibility of a doctrine which, if accepted, breaks the whole chain of cause and effect, and makes the later history of the world not an evolution of previously operative process, but the result of an abrupt, mysterious interference from without, incommensurable with any other set of spiritual forces. I am content to say that to my mind the doctrine becomes daily more impossible to any one who thinks seriously and tries to picture to himself distinctly the true nature of the great world processes. What is to my purpose is, that it seems to me to be not only infinitely more credible, but also more satisfactory and more generous—if there be properly a question of generosity—to do justice to the disciples as well as to the master—to believe that the creed was fermenting in the hearts and minds of millions of human beings; and that, although the imperfect and superstitious elements by which it was alloyed were due to the medium in which it was propagated, yet, on the other hand, it succeeded so far as it corresponded to the better instincts of great masses of men, struggling blindly and through many errors to discover rules of conduct and modes of conceiving the universe more congenial than the old to their better nature, and prepared to form a society by crystallising round the nucleus which best corresponded to their aspirations.

When so regarded, it seems to me, and only when so regarded, we can see in the phenomenon something which may give us solid ground for hopes of humanity, and enable us to do justice to countless obscure benefactors. The corruption of human nature, as theologians sometimes tell us, expresses a simple fact. Undoubtedly, it expresses a fact which nobody, so far as I know, ever thought of denying—the fact that there are bad instincts in human nature ; that many men are cruel, sensual, and false ; and that every man is more or less liable to succumb to temptation. But the essential meaning of the old theological dogma was, I take it, something different. It meant that man was so corrupt that he could only be made good by a miracle ; that even his apparent virtues are splendid sins unless they come from divine grace ; and, in short, that men cannot be really elevated without supernatural interference. If all that is good in men comes from their religions, and if religions are only explicable as inspirations from without, that, no doubt, logically follows. I prefer, myself, to believe that, though all men are weak, and a good many utter scoundrels ; yet human nature does contain good principles ; that those principles tend, however slow and imperfect may be the process, gradually to obtain the mastery ; and that the great religions of the races, while

indicating the intellectual and moral shortcomings of mankind, indicate also the gradual advance of ethical ideals, worked out by the natural and essential tendencies of the race. And thus, as it seems to me, this conception of the mode of growth of religions and of morality, which gathers strength as we come to take a more reasonable view of the world's history, is closely connected with the doctrine that, instead of ascribing all good achievement to the hero who drops from heaven, or springs spontaneously from the earth, we should steadily remember that he is only possible, and his work can only be successfully secured, by the tacit co-operation of the innumerable unknown persons in whose hearts his words find an echo because they are already feeling after the same ideal which is in him more completely embodied.

In our judgment of such cases there is, then, an injustice so far as we make a false estimate of the right distribution of praise and gratitude. It would be an injustice, in a stricter sense, to the persons ignored, if we regarded such gratitude as the appropriate and main reward of a noble life. I need not repeat the commonplaces of moralists as to the real value of posthumous fame, nor inquire whether it implies an illusion, nor how far the desire for such fame is, in point of fact, a strong motive with many people. This only I will note—that obscurity is a

condition, and by no means an altogether unpleasant condition, of much of the very best work that is done. The general or the statesman is conspicuous in connection with successful enterprise in which his subordinates necessarily do a great part of the labour. It is impossible for the outside world to form a correct judgment in such cases ; and, therefore, there is no hardship to the particular persons concerned, if they are simply ignored where they would, certainly, be misjudged ; and if they, therefore, work in obscurity, content with the approval of the very few who can estimate their merits. There is a compensation, as we see, when we reflect upon the moral disadvantages of conspicuous station. Literary people, for example, must be very unobservant if they do not notice how demoralising is the influence of public applause, and the constant inducement to court notoriety. It is unwholesome to live in an atmosphere which constantly stimulates and incites the weaknesses to which we are most liable. And many of our first writers must, I should fancy, feel pangs of self-humiliation when they contrast the credit which they have got for popular work with the very scanty recognition which comes to many who have applied equal talents to the discharge of duties often far more beneficial to mankind, but, from their nature, performed in the shade. "I," such a



man, I fancy, must sometimes say to himself, "am quoted in every newspaper; I am puffed, and praised, and denounced; not to know me is to write yourself down a dunce; and, yet, have I done as much for the good of my kind as this or that humble friend, who would be astonished were his name ever to be uttered in public?" Some such thought, for example, is inspired by Johnson's most pathetic verses, when the great lexicographer, the acknowledged dictator of English literature, thought of the poor dependant, the little humble quack doctor, Levett, who was content, literally, to be fed with the crumbs from his tables. But the obscure dependant, as the patron felt, had done all that he could to alleviate the sum of human misery.

His virtues walked their narrow round,  
Nor made a pause, nor left a void;  
And, sure, the Eternal Master found  
The single talent well employed.

Have I not, Johnson seems to have felt, really done less to soothe misery by my *Dictionary* and my *Ramblers* than this obscure labourer in the back lanes of London, of whom, but for my verses, no one would have heard even the name?

A full answer to questions suggested by these thoughts would, perhaps, require an estimate of the relative value of different aims and different functions

in life; and, for such an estimate, there are no adequate grounds. In one of Browning's noblest poems, Rabbi Ben Ezra—of whom I must say that he strikes me as being a little too self-complacent—puts a relevant question. "Who," he asks, "shall arbitrate?"

Ten men love what I hate ;  
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive ;  
Ten who, in ears and eyes,  
Match me ; we all surmise,  
They this thing and I that : whom shall my soul believe ?

And he answers or suggests one condition of a satisfactory answer, by saying that we are not to take the coarse judgment of the world, which goes by the work achieved. We must remember—

All instincts immature,  
All purposes unsure,  
That, weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's account ;  
Thoughts hardly to be packed  
Into a narrow act ;  
Fancies that broke through language and escaped ;  
All I would never be,  
All men ignored in me,  
That I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

If it were proper to treat a poetical utterance of this kind like a deliberate philosophical theory, I might wish to argue the point a little with the rabbi. But, at any rate, he points to considerations which

show how little any one can judge of merit by any tangible and generally accessible test. I am content to say that this sentiment gives one—and a very impressive—answer to a problem which presses upon us the more as we grow older. It is natural for a man who feels that he has done most of his work, that the night is coming, and, as it seems, coming with accelerated speed; who feels, too, that whatever he has done or may do, he can no longer have the approval of those whose approval was dear to him as his breath;—it is natural for such a man to look back, to take stock more or less of his own performances perhaps, and at any rate to endeavour to estimate at their true worth the services which he has received from others. What, he may ask, has he done with his talents? what little fragment has he achieved of what might once have been in his power? The answer is pretty sure to have a very melancholy side to it; and it will lead to the question, what part of that fragment was really worth doing? What were the few really solid services which he may set off as some satisfaction to his self-esteem, against his countless errors and his wanderings in wrong directions, and his attempts to achieve the impossible, and the waste of energy upon the trifling and the worthless in which he is pretty sure to have spent a very large proportion of his time? When we try to return a

verdict upon such issues, we feel painfully to how many illusions we are subject. When we are young we naturally accept the commonplaces, and do not question the ideals amid which we happen to have grown up; we are not conscious of the movement which we share. As long as we are floating with the current, we are not even aware that any current exists. We take our own little world to be the fixed base, quite unconscious that it is all the time whirling and spinning along a most complex course. And so it is difficult, even if the thought of making the attempt ever occurs to us, to try to occupy the position of a bystander looking on at life from outside, and endeavouring to pronounce some general opinion as to its merits or defects—its happiness or misery as a whole. "What a queer place this is!" I remember a man once saying to me abruptly; and I thought that he was referring to the steamboat on which we were fellow-passengers. I found that he had been suddenly struck by the oddity of the universe in general; and it seemed to me that there was a great deal to be said for a remark which seldom occurs to those people who take things for granted. We are roused sometimes by a philosopher who professes pessimism or optimism, to ask and to try to answer such questions. The answers, we know, are apt to be painfully discordant.

Is the world on the whole a scene of misery, of restless desires, proving that we are miserable now, and doomed never to obtain satisfaction? is it our only wisdom to give up the will to live; to hope that all this visible and tangible scenery is so much illusion, and to aspire to sink into Nirvana? Shall we try to conquer all earthly appetites by a thoroughgoing asceticism, and cultivate those spiritual emotions which can only find full satisfaction in another and a better world? Or shall we agree that, after all, the love of the true and the beautiful, or, it may be, the physically pleasurable, gives a real solid comfort for the time, which it would be idle to drop for a shadow? Is the world a scene of probation, in which we are to be fitted for higher spheres beyond human ken by the hearty and strenuous exertion of every faculty that we possess? or shall we say that such action is a good in itself, which requires to be supplemented by no vision of any ulterior end? Shall we say that this is the best of all possible worlds because the fittest always tends to prevail, or that it is the worst because even the greatest wretchedness which is compatible with bare existence can still survive?

Philosophers, no doubt, contradict each other, because even philosophers are not exempt from the universal weakness. The explanation that pessimism means a disordered liver, and the counter remark that

optimism means a cold heart and a good digestion, are too familiar to need exposition. Each man's macrocosm is apt to be related to his microcosm, as the convex to the concave of a curve. To say the world is disagreeable, means that I find it disagreeable; and that may be either my own fault or the world's. Nor is it easy to correct the personal error by observation, for the observer carries himself and his illusions with him. Has such-and-such a life been a happy one? How are we to decide? We are often subject to what may be called the dramatic illusion. We judge by the catastrophe, by the success or failure of the assumed end. We see a noble young man struck down by some accident, and we think of his career sadly, because the promise has not been fulfilled. Is it not equally reasonable to say that the promise was itself a blessing? that the man we regret had his twenty or thirty years of hopefulness, confidence, and happiness, and that that was a clear gain even if we lose the result which we might have anticipated? Or we are impressed by the more exciting incidents of a life, the blows which crushed a man at intervals; and we forget all the monotonous years of tranquil happiness which, if we apply an arithmetical test, may have occupied by far the greater part of his existence. Southey, for example, argues that although we remember Cowper chiefly

for his terrible mental suffering, we shall find, if we add up the moments of happiness and misery, that he probably had, on the balance, a life of much more enjoyment than torture. So, when we speak of the misery of a nation at the time of some great trouble—the French Revolution, for example—it is difficult to remember how small was the proportion of actual sufferers; how many thousands or millions of children were enjoying their little sports, utterly ignorant of the distant storm; how many mothers were absorbed in watching their children; and how many quiet commonplace people were going about their daily peaceful labour, pretty much as usual, and with only a vague—and possibly pleasurable—excitement at the news, which occasionally drifted to them, of the catastrophes in a different sphere. Carlyle, in one of his most vivid and famous passages, has incidentally drawn the contrast. Or, if we try to form an estimate of the balance of happiness and misery through any portion of the race, and appeal to experience for an answer, we must certainly remember how limited is the field of observation, even of the best informed, and the most impartial; how rigidly they are confined for their direct knowledge to one little section of one part of the race; and how the vast majority—the thousand millions or so who are altogether beyond their ken—are known to them only by



statistical tables or the casual reports of superficial observers.

As there are so many difficulties in forming an estimate, as we are not agreed as to the true ends of human life, nor as to the degrees in which those ends are actually attained, nor as to the efficacy of the various causes which determine the success or failure of the means employed, it becomes any one to put forward his own opinion upon the topics to which such considerations apply, with all modesty. And, yet, I think that I may dwell upon some truths which may be admitted by those who differ upon these difficult problems, and, as I fancy, deserve more weight than they generally receive, even though they have become commonplaces. The main condition of human happiness, say some people, is physical health. A man whose organs are all working satisfactorily cannot fail to be happy under any but very abnormal conditions; as, conversely, a grain of sand in the wrong place will make any life a burden. No one will dispute the truth contained in such *dicta*; and, perhaps, as we realise more distinctly the importance of sound health to our neighbours and to our descendants, as well as to ourselves, we shall lay greater stress upon the conduct which is conducive to its preservation. We shall see that what is, apparently, a mere dictate of personal prudence, has,

also, its ethical aspect. But, without dwelling upon this view, we may apply the analogy to society. Whatever morality precisely means, and whatever happiness means, it clearly indicates what we call—and I think that it is no mere 'metaphor—a healthy state of society. This, again, implies, first of all, the health of those domestic relations which are as the ultimate molecular forces which bind together the social tissue. The society, we may say without hesitation, in which the reciprocal duties of husbands and wives, parents and children, are instinctively recognised and habitually observed, has, so far, secured the most deeply-seated and essential condition of happiness and virtue; the society in which the union of married people normally produces harmony, and the absolute identity of interests and affections, in which children are brought up in a pure home atmosphere, with an embodiment of the beauty of domestic love always before their eyes, imbibing unconsciously the tradition of a high moral standard, and so prepared to repay, in due time, to others the services lavishly and ungrudgingly bestowed upon them by their elders,—so far represents perfectly sound health. The degree in which any ethical theory recognises and reveals the essential importance of the family relation is, I think, the best test of its approximation to the truth. An unworthy

view of domestic happiness may lead to the ascetic view which sets up a sham and Quixotic ideal ; or to the cynical view which regards it as a mere case of selfish indulgence. I do not deny that the relation, like all other human relations, may require modification as circumstances change. Difficulties arise, as when we notice the great social changes which have broken up ancient ties, and have tended to weaken the family bond by facilitating desertion, and increasing the floating population. And many socialist schemes appear at first sight to be, and sometimes are, consciously designed to weaken the sense of responsibility of parents. I, of course, cannot now discuss a point which is, undoubtedly, of the highest importance ; but I am certainly convinced that the merits of any change must be tested by its tendency to preserve, and, if possible, intensify the strength of this underlying bond upon which the welfare of society depends far more intimately than upon any other human relation.

If this be true, it follows also that to those activities which knit families together, which help to enlarge the highest ideal of domestic life, we owe a greater debt than to any other kind of conduct. And to this I add that, as I believe, the highest services of this kind are rendered by persons condemned, or perhaps I should say privileged, to live

in obscurity; whose very names will soon be forgotten, and who are entirely eclipsed by people whose services, though not equally valuable, are by their nature more public. To prove such an assertion is, of course, impossible. I give it only as my personal impression—for what it is worth, after any deductions you may please to make upon the score of the great fallibility of such impressions; and only because, correct or otherwise, it may serve to bring out aspects of the truth which we are apt to neglect. I have lived long enough to have had opportunities of seeing many eminent men and women. I have insensibly formed some kind of estimate of the services which they have rendered to me and my like; and I record, as far as I can, the result upon my own convictions. I will put aside for the moment the half-dozen men of really first-rate eminence,—the men whose names are written upon all the great intellectual and social movements of the century. I will think for the present only of those who may be placed in the second rank; of those who do not profess to have originated, but only to have diffused, important thoughts; who have acted as lieutenants to the great leaders, and become known to their contemporaries, with little prospect of filling any important place in the memory of their successors. Yet even such men bulk far more largely

in our eyes than multitudes of men and women whose names will never be known outside their own little parish, or even their family circles. And then I ask myself, how far the estimate thus formed corresponds to the real value of the services performed. I think that I can speak most easily by deserting the line of abstract argument, and endeavouring to draw a portrait or two, which you need not assume to correspond too closely to particular facts. I mean to suggest reflections which will really apply in many representative cases, and to refer to typical instances of general truths. I will first mention one such case which happened to strike me forcibly at the time, and which no one here, I am quite certain, will be able to identify. Long years ago I knew a young man at college; he was so far from being intellectually eminent that he had great difficulty in passing his examinations; he died from the effects of an accident within a very short time after leaving the university, and hardly any one would now remember his name. He had not the smallest impression that there was anything remarkable about himself, and looked up to his teachers and his more brilliant companions with a loyal admiration which would have made him wonder that they should ever take notice of him. And yet I often thought then, and I believe, in looking back, that I thought

rightly, that he was of more real use to his contemporaries than any one of the persons to whose influence they would most naturally refer as having affected their development. The secret was a very simple one. Without any special intellectual capacity, he somehow represented with singular completeness a beautiful moral type. He possessed the "simple faith miscalled simplicity," and was so absolutely unselfish, so conspicuously pure in his whole life and conduct, so unsuspicious of evil in others, so sweet and loyal in his nature, that to know him was to have before one's eyes an embodiment of some of the most lovable and really admirable qualities that a human being can possess. He was a living exemplification of the truth which some great humorists have embodied in their writings, the truth that simplicity at which fools laugh may be venerable to wise observers. Young men were not always immaculate in those days : I don't know that they are now ; some of them probably were vicious in conduct, and might be cynical in the views which they openly expressed. But whatever might be their failings, they were at the age when all but the depraved—that is, I hope and fully believe, all but a very small minority—were capable of being deeply impressed by this concrete example. They might affect to ridicule, but it was impossible that even the

ridicule should not be of the kindly sort ; blended and tempered with something that was more like awe—profound respect, at least, for the beauty of soul that underlay the humble exterior. The direct moral addresses which took the form of eloquent sermons or of good advice naturally gained an incomparably higher reputation for those who uttered them. But, considering the facility with which the impressions so made evaporate from the minds of the hearers, I often thought that this obscure influence, the more impressive when one felt it because of its entire unconsciousness, probably did far more to stimulate good feelings and higher aspirations among his companions than all the official exhortations to which they ever listened. He would have been unfeignedly surprised to hear, what I most sincerely believe to be the truth, that his tutor owed incomparably more to his living exemplification of what is meant by a character of unblemished purity and simplicity, than he owed to the tutor whose respectable platitudes he received with unaffected humility.

The case—for various reasons—impressed me deeply ; and I have often thought of it and of the principle which it illustrates in later years. I once knew, for example, a woman whose whole life was devoted to domestic duties, and who confessed to me that she had sometimes felt a touch of humiliation



when she thought how narrow was her own sphere of action, while her husband was daily deciding upon great questions of high political importance. Some women would have drawn the conclusion, that the exclusion of women from political activity was a grievance to be abated; and such people might receive with scorn the suggestion that the discharge of the domestic duty might possibly be as important as the discharge of the more conspicuous function. The argument about the proper sphere of women is now generally treated with contempt; and I am perfectly ready to admit that it begs the question, and is often a mere utterance of blind prejudice. No one, I hope, could assert more willingly than I, that the faculties of women should be cultivated as fully as possible, and that every sphere in which their faculties can be effectively applied should be thrown open to them. But the doctrine sometimes tacitly confounded with this, that the sphere generally assigned to women is necessarily lower or less important than others, is not to be admitted, because the contradictory may be misapplied. The domestic influence is, no doubt, confined within narrower limits; but then, within those limits it is incomparably stronger and more certain of effect. The man or woman can really mould the character of a little circle, and determine the whole life of one little section of the next genera-

tion; when it may be very difficult to say whether the influence which they can bring to bear upon a class or a nation is really perceptible at all, or does not even operate in the direction opposite to that intended. And I could not help thinking that a woman who was bringing up sons and daughters ready to quit themselves like brave men and women in the great struggle of life, might be doing something more really important than her conspicuous husband, who was, after all, only part of a vast and complicated machinery, nominally directed by him, but, in reality, controlling all his energy, and, not impossibly, working out the very results which he most disapproved.

It is, therefore, with no reference to any of the political theories of women's rights, and so forth, that I venture to insist upon this topic. I think that we habitually under-estimate the enormous value of the services, whether of man or woman, done in the shade, and confined within a very limited area. Let me attempt, again, to draw a portrait, not all imaginary, which may explain, at least, what I often feel—the contrast between the real worth of such lives and the recognition which they can ever receive. Wordsworth, in one of those poems which show best how true and tender were his moral instincts, has described one who was—

A perfect woman, nobly planned  
To warn, to comfort, and command;  
And yet a spirit too, and bright  
With something of an angel light.

The words have often come to me of late, till I fancy that I could supply a commentary. The woman of whom Wordsworth speaks was, when he first saw her, a "phantom of delight," an embodiment of feminine beauty, and, as such, possessing a characteristic perhaps superfluous from a moral point of view. I have known and know women, not exactly beautiful, before whom I would gladly bow as deeply as I would if they were beautiful as Helen of Troy. But a poet must be allowed to take pleasure in beauty, and we may grant to it a certain place that it deserves among higher qualities. For it does so when the possessor is absolutely—not unaware of the fact, for that is hardly possible, nor, perhaps, desirable—but absolutely untouched by any vanity or self-consciousness. The beauty, one may say, gives, at least, an opportunity for displaying a quality which otherwise would not have so good an occasion of manifestation. And, moreover, there is a beauty of the rarest and most exquisite, which, if not the product, is, or at least seems to be, the spontaneous accompaniment of nobility of mind and character. Some persons, by a singular felicity, possess beauty as one of their essential attributes; it seems to be not an accident

or an addition, but a part of their essence, which must mould every detail, which shines through body as well as soul, and is but the outward and visible sign of all that is sweet and elevated. Wordsworth's ideal woman is—

Not too bright or good  
For human nature's daily food,  
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,  
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles :

and yet displays equally—

The reason firm, the temperate will,  
Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill.

We cannot, even in our thoughts, separate the artistic homage which we pay to the external appearance, and that which we pay to the inner qualities, of which they are apparently the inevitable and predestined symbol. We have before us the ideal—the type which reconciles all the conditions of human life, physical and moral—the “perfect woman,” who is also the fitting vehicle of the angel light.

But it is, of course, upon the qualities symbolised and not upon the outward symbols that we must insist. I will, therefore, say, that the inward beauty, whether fully represented or not by the outward form, implies, in the first place, the absence of all those qualities which tend to lower and vulgarise life. What we call the worldly view,

for example, of love and marriage, is simply unintelligible to such a nature. Love means, to it, an absolute self-surrender, and the complete fusion of its own life with the life of the beloved object. It can only be granted in return for a reciprocal surrender; and becomes the mutual passion by which fear and distrust are utterly cast out; and the intensity proves not liability to weak illusions, but the sure insight of the lofty instincts which cannot fail to recognise corresponding instincts in others. To the lower mind, such a character appears to be too highly strung, too impassioned, romantic, and careless of the solid advantages which secure at least comfort. To those of more or less congenial sentiment, it will rather appear to imply a spirit which, because it breathes a higher element than that at which men habitually live, perceives also more distinctly what are the truest and deepest sources of all that deserves to be called real happiness. To live in an atmosphere of the strongest and most unqualified affection, to have the very substance of life woven out of the unreserved love of a worthy object, is its ideal; and that ideal represents, I am convinced, the highest and purest happiness that can be enjoyed in this world.

Suppose, now, that one so endowed is struck by one of those terrible blows which shiver the very

foundations of life ; which make the outside world a mere discordant nightmare, and seem to leave for the only reality a perpetual and gnawing pain, which lulls for an instant only to be revived by every contact with facts. Sorrow becomes the element in which one lives and moves. Consolation, according to the familiar phrase, is idle ; for the vulgar notion of consoling is that which Sir Walter Scott attributes to one of his characters : it is to try to prove that the very thing for which we offer consolation has not happened—in other words, to undertake an enterprise which is obviously hopeless and illusory. Yet the greatest test of true nobility of character is its power of turning even the bitterest grief to account. The lofty and simple nature sorrows ; it does not attempt to shut its eyes to the full extent of the calamity, nor seek to distract itself by a forgetfulness which might obscure its most sacred visions of the past ; nor, on the other hand, to make a parade of its sensibility, or try to foster or stimulate enervating emotions. It knows instinctively that grief, terrible as it is, is yet, in another sense, an invaluable possession. The sufferer who has eaten his bread with herbs learns, as the poet puts it, to know the heavenly powers. For he or she acquires a deeper and keener sympathy with all who are desolate and afflicted ; and the natural affections become blended,

if with a certain melancholy, yet with that quick and delicate perception of the suffering of others which gives the only consolation worthy of the name—the sense of something soothing and softening and inspiring in the midst of the bitterest agony. Grief, so taken, may be stunning and deadening for the time; it may make life a heavy burden, from which hope and eager interest have disappeared: “weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable”; but by slow degrees it undergoes a transmutation into more steady and profound love of whatsoever may still be left. The broken and mangled fibres imperceptibly find new attachments; and the only solution of the terrible dilemma is reached when time, which heals the actual laceration, enables the sufferer to feel that the new ties do not imply infidelity to the objects still beloved, but are a continuous development of the indelible emotions, and that the later activities are but a carrying on of the old duties, made more sacred and solemn by the old grief and its associations.

A lofty nature which has profited by passing through the furnace acquires claims not only upon our love but upon our reverence. It becomes perhaps within the little circle with which it is familiar the obvious and immediate resort whenever some blow of sorrow or sickness has fallen upon one of its fellows. The figure which I attempt truly to



describe is happily not unfamiliar. We have all, I hope, known some one who is instinctively called to mind whenever there is need of the loving kindness which seems so obvious and spontaneous that it does not even occur to the bestower to connect the conduct with self-sacrifice. Such persons appear to be formed by nature for ministering angels, and move among us unconscious of their claims to our devotion, and bringing light into darkness by their simple presence with as little thought that they deserve our gratitude as that they ought to emerge from obscurity. Happiness, peaceful and contented at least, if not the old bright and confident happiness, may come in time; and new spheres be bound together by the attractive force of a character which, if it is not more intrinsically lovable, has gained a more pathetic charm from its experience. The desire to relieve suffering has become a settled instinct; and, even when there is no special appeal to it, is incessantly overflowing in those "little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love" which, according to Wordsworth again, are the "best portion of a good man's life". Whether that be quite true I know not; but in so far as such acts seem to testify most unequivocally to the constant flow of a current of sympathetic tenderness, always ready to seize upon every occasion of giving happiness, on a

child's birthday as on the parent's deathbed, they perhaps speak to us most convincingly of an all-pervading sweetness of character. An assiduous and watchful desire to show kindness, which makes a perpetual succession of such little attentions a part of the practical religion of the doer, may generate a corresponding love even more forcibly than the sacrifices made in obedience to a more conspicuous appeal for help.

The value of such a life as I have tried imperfectly to indicate is not to be estimated by the number of good actions performed, or by any definite list of the particular consequences achieved. It may be hard to say how many pangs have been soothed, how much happiness has been added in special cases, by one who goes through life absorbed in such activities. But above and beyond all the separate instances, such a person,—the object only to a few, perhaps, of love and reverence, but to those few the object of those feelings in the most unreserved and unequivocal form,—is something far more than a source of any number of particular benefits. To reckon up and estimate the value of such benefits is a conceivable undertaking; but we cannot attempt to calculate the value of a spiritual force which has moulded our lives, which has helped by a simple consciousness of its existence to make us gentler, nobler, and purer in

our thoughts of the world ; which has constantly set before us a loftier ideal than we could frame for ourselves ; which has bestowed upon us an ever-present criterion of the goodness or badness of our own motives by our perception of the light in which they appear to a simple and elevated character ; which has made every cowardly and worldly thought shrink away abashed in the presence of noble instincts ; which has given us a sympathy so close and constant that, as with the light of the sun, we are apt to be unconscious of its essential importance to us until some accident makes us realise the effect of its eclipse ; and which, therefore, has in some sense become a part of ourselves, a restraining and elevating and softening impulse, to which we cling as to the worthiest and most indispensable of our possessions.

I am not speaking from imagination. I am trying to utter convictions springing from my personal experience, and which I feel—most painfully—that I cannot adequately express. I could not say more, even if by saying more I could express myself adequately, without a sense of a kind of profanity for uttering what should be kept for a few. But though I speak for myself, I hope and I entirely believe that I am therefore speaking for many others also. There are few who have the eyes to see

who have not recognised some such light shining upon their lives, and as one main source of what they have done or said if least unworthy. I fancy that the thought which naturally occurs to us when we reflect upon such an influence will be: was I, could I, be worthy of it? what am I that such goodness should have come to me? or, what, if anything, have I done to transmit to others the blessings conferred upon me? Such questions have various aspects, and I do not quite see how they could be reduced to a form admitting of a bare logical answer. It now seems to me almost unbecoming to dwell upon the comparison which I contemplated at starting. I imagined a man who has made some such impression upon the world as is recognised by public reputation, to compare his own achievement with such achievements as these, which are absolutely private, and neither seek nor desire any public reward. In truth, the two things are, perhaps, strictly incommensurable. They must be measured by different standards, and are of importance in different spheres. And yet I must try to say this much. The achievements to which I have referred as in their nature public and recognisable, should certainly be considered with gratitude. Yet, when we attempt to estimate their worth we are sensible of terrible drawbacks. I have passed, let us say, a

measure admirably useful, or written a book which has made a mark. Certainly I have done a good action. But what if I had not done it? Were there not hundreds of people who would have been only too glad to take my place? I have been successful because I happen to have been in the front rank, which was impelled by thousands of eager supporters. I have said just a little better than my rivals what they were all striving to say; and my highest reward will be that my name will be attached in my own generation, and possibly even in the next, to some particular opinion which yet would have come to the birth without me. I have made a certain commotion on the surface for a moment or two, but the ripple will die away in a few years; and, important as I may seem to myself, I have only to look back for a generation to recognise the plain fact that there have not been at any period more than one or two conspicuous workers the products of whose activity can be distinctly recognised at the present day. Even in regard to them, it is often doubtful whether they did more harm or good; whether they did not direct human energy along the wrong paths, and do as much in giving currency to fallacies as in extending permanent truths.

Now, after making such deductions, which to me, at least, seem to be essentially necessary, we can, I

think, do justice to the truth which is contained in Browning's poem. You are not, he seems to say, to measure the worth of life by the amount of work done in it, by the tangible and obvious results which can be tested by the world's coarse finger and thumb. Rather, he suggests, the value depends upon the excellence of the soul which is fashioned into "heaven's consummate cup" by the stress of the potter's wheel; by the joys and sorrows, the trials and triumphs, which have affected it in its passage through life. I should prefer to say that the kind of dilemma so suggested is not really to the purpose. The rabbi may seem to speak, as I said, with a little too much complacency, if he be interpreted as sharing the feeling which is often, however unjustly, attributed to Goethe—that his supreme end was the cultivation of his own nature, and that he regarded himself as a work of art, to be elaborated for its own sake, and enriched by experience even at the cost of others. But in a better interpretation this does not apply: for the very process by which the noble nature is developed and cultivated, implies the closest and most active sympathy with suffering, and an invariable reference to the highest aims of life. It becomes perfect, that is, by constantly rendering invaluable services to others; and there is, therefore, no meaning in drawing a distinction between the

services and the influence upon the soul itself. They are parts of the same indivisible process. What is true and noble, as I think, in the rabbi's doctrine, is that which I have already tried to indicate: namely, that the worth of such a life is not exhausted by a catalogue of the good deeds done, but that, beyond and above all them, remains the inestimable value within its own circle of the very existence of a natural symbol of the good and holy—by the “holy” I understand that which is not only moral, but beautiful by reason of its morality—and the incalculable benefits to it of the pure fountain of all good influences which descend upon all within its reach. The stimulus which is given to the beholders of such a life—by the clear perception that morality does not mean a string of judicious commonplaces, but can be embodied as the spring of a harmonious life, and reveal itself as a concrete flesh-and-blood human being—is something which transcends in value all the particular results which we can tabulate and reckon up. We must think of it, not as the cause of so many external benefits, but as the manifestation of a spiritual force which modifies and raises the characters of all its surroundings. If the sphere within which it distinctly operates is far narrower than that of political or literary achievement, it is also incomparably purer, and works without a single



drawback. Every religion has its saints, and honours them in various ways, not always altogether edifying. But that man is unfortunate who has not a saint of his own—some one in whose presence, or in the very thought of whom, he does not recognise a superior, before whom it becomes him to bow with reverence and gratitude, and who has purified the atmosphere and strengthened the affections in a little circle from which the influence may be transmitted to others. The saint will be forgotten all too soon—long before less valuable, but accidentally more conspicuous, services have passed out of mind—but the moral elevation, even of a small circle, is a benefit which may be propagated indefinitely.

If we cannot hope to preserve the name, we can try to carry on the good work ; to maintain the ties which have been formed and propagate the goodwill through widening circles. That, I think, is what every one feels under the stress of the most terrible trials of life. We are shocked by the sense of the inevitable oblivion that will hide all that we loved so well. There is, according to my experience, only one thought which is inspiring, and—if not in the vulgar sense consoling, for it admits the existence of an unspeakable calamity—points, at least, to the direction in which we may gradually achieve something like peace and hopefulness without the slightest disloyalty

to the objects of our love. It is the thought which I can only express by saying that we may learn to feel as if those who had left us had yet become part of ourselves; that we have become so permeated by their influence, that we can still think of their approval and sympathy as a stimulating and elevating power, and be conscious that we are more or less carrying on their work, in their spirit. We find, as Lowell says in his noble ode—

We find in our dull road their shining track;  
In every nobler mood  
We feel the orient of their spirit glow,  
Part of our life's unalterable good,  
Of all our saintlier aspiration;  
They come transfigured back,  
Secure from change in their high-hearted ways,  
Beautiful evermore, and with the rays  
Of morn on their white shields of expectation.

Alas, he adds, even the best deeds will be hidden before long by "the thoughtless drift of the deciduous years". Yes; they will be forgotten before long, as we too shall be forgotten—the incalculable majority within a generation or two. The thought may be painful, but the reasonable conclusion is, I think, not that we should fret over the inevitable; rather that we should purify our minds from this as from other illusions, and feel ashamed of the selfish desire that

our own names should be preserved when we know that so many who were far better and nobler than ourselves will inevitably be forgotten, and were better and nobler without the stimulus of any such paltry desire. Gratitude to the obscure is, in this sense, I take it, a duty, which we cannot practise without a proportional moral benefit. It enables us to rise above the constant temptation to seek for notoriety at any price, and to make our ultimate aim the achievement of good work, not the chorus of popular applause which may be aroused. Thoroughly to conquer that temptation is, I take it, one of the objects which every man should set before himself. And nothing, I think, helps one more than a vivid and enduring consciousness of the enormous debt which we owe to men and women who lived in obscurity, who never had a thought of emerging out of obscurity, and whose ennobling influence has yet become a part of every higher principle of action in ourselves. I may or I may not have formed too low an estimate of the services of the few heroes who stand conspicuously above the ordinary level; but I am certain that nothing that I can say would exaggerate the importance of many who have no claims to such a position. To cherish and preserve that influence by every faculty we possess seems to me to be our plainest duty; and we may comfort ourselves,

if comfort be needed, by the reflection that, though the memory may be transitory, the good done by a noble life and character may last far beyond any horizon which can be realised by our imaginations.

THE END.









UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
LIBRARY

Do not  
remove  
the card  
from this  
Pocket.

Acme Library Card Pocket  
Under Pat. "Ref. Index File."  
Made by LIBRARY BUREAU, Boston

Author Stephen, (Sir) Leslie  
Title Social rights and duties. Vol. 2

82539

Philos  
Ethics  
582850

